COMBATTING CULTISM IN NIGERIA'S DIGITAL SOCIETY BY LEVERAGING YOUTHPRENUERSHIP FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
It is obvious that literature abound on cultism, community development, youth and youthpreneurship but combating cultism in Nigeria's digital society by leveraging youthpreneurship for community development is evidently not in existence, creating a gap which this paper seeks to fill by exploring the multifaceted approach required to address cultism in Nigeria's digitalized society, highlighting the pivotal role of youth entrepreneurship in offering viable alternatives for positive youth engagement. It traces the historical roots of cultism and secret societies in Nigeria to the pre-colonial era, with particular focus on their emergence in university settings in 1952. The study aims to identify the underlying factors contributing to cultism and its detrimental impact on community development, advocating for the implementation of youthpreneurship initiatives as a solution. Employing a survey design, the research gathers quantitative data through questionnaires. Its findings indicate that cultism is deeply entrenched in Nigerian society, fueled by factors such as poverty, unemployment, and political instability. The paper recommends the effective implementation of youth development policies, including skills training, mentorship programs, and access to funding, to nurture entrepreneurial spirit among youth and foster innovation.

Introduction

The activities of cult group were first recorded in the Nigerian tertiary institutions in 1952 by an informal cultural group though, with the intentions to fight injustice. Presently, the activities of cult groups have crippling effects on the communities and undermine socio-economic activities and welfare of the citizenry (Onoh, 2006). Cultism resonates gangsterism in Nigeria. People take cultism to be the act of joining and operating under a secret group with ritual practices involving members' initiation, policies and dealings tied in a blood bond. In Nigeria, such activities usually exist in communities where there are lots of schools and youths. Ogunade (2002), sees cultism as a confined formal association of people committed to a uniformed purpose with reserved sacred ideology that anchors on rites centering on their secret symbols. Ajayi (2005), aver that cultism is a ritual involvement by individuals or groups whose membership, admission, policy and initiation ceremoniousness as well as activities are carried out in secret and meant to remain secret with all manner of negativity on both the members and non-members. Demystifying further, Azelama, Alude and Imhonda (2004), affirmed that cultism is an aggregation of persons with unit of purpose identifiable by symbols, whose rites and veneration are covered in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken. Maxey (2005), deduced the meaning of "cult" from a Latin word "cultus' which means veneration or worship to a god or deity. Oxford dictionary of sociology (1996) cited in Rotimi (2005) defined cult as a "set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god or a small group in peculiar religious activities whose belief are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic". It is identifiable that membership of such outfit is hierarchically structured and that gives the leaders absolute control over other members. This control entails the use of force to subdue and command members (Opaluwah, 2000). While on the other hand, secret society is considered a more matured organization with tightly-hidden activities, events, inner functioning, or membership, a little more reserved than youth cult groups. Although, these days these clandestine groups no longer hide their identity, existence and memberships, unlike the pre-digital era. However, secret society is different from surveillance, intelligence and counter intelligence agencies militia or insurgent groups that fight guerilla warfare, those sects hide their activities and memberships but maintain a public presence.

Demystifying the aforementioned definitions, one might infer that cultism or cult practices has a common characteristic hence, the elements of secrecy, oath or blood covenant which makes it difficult for them to renounce membership. In addendum, Ogunbameru (2004), affirmed that any organization that operates exclusively at an odd hour with inevitability of clash with the accepted norms and values of everyday life is a secret cult. For Okewu (2006), cultism is "barbaric, clandestine and a diabolical evil association that has lost contact with sanity and acceptable societal norms". Contemporary scholars recognize the violent nature of cultism, which includes activities such as destruction of property, extortion, armed robbery, and murder, undermining societal norms and values. Cultism thrives amidst societal decadence, eroding traditional values and promoting criminal behavior among youths. The paper advocates for a multifaceted approach to addressing cultism, with a particular focus on youthpreneurship as a mechanism for empowerment and positive engagement.

Statement of the problem

Cultism in Nigeria dates back to the early days of western education and has since evolved into a pervasive issue affecting communities nationwide. Initially, cult groups were formed for social integration and solidarity, with rituals and ceremonies shrouded in secrecy. However, the infiltration of cultism into universities in 1952 marked a turning point, as these groups became increasingly associated with violence and criminality. Today, cultism resonates with gangsterism, with members engaging in activities such as initiation rites, policy enactments and violent clashes with rival groups. While the original intent of cultism was noble, its transformation into a violent phenomenon has had devastating consequences for communities, leading to destruction of property, extortion, and loss of lives. Despite efforts to curb cultism, including legislative measures and law enforcement interventions, the phenomenon persists, fueled by factors such as peer pressure, insecurity, and societal decadence. Addressing cultism requires a comprehensive approach that addresses its root causes and provides viable alternatives for youth engagement.

In today's digital age, cultism has evolved, presenting new challenges and opportunities for intervention. Recognizing the urgency of addressing this issue, government has established policies bordering on developing the youths, realization of dreams and aspirations without distinctions, safety cum secured environments, enabling stakeholders in youth development an all-inclusive framework which anchors on realization of potentials of all youths irrespective of religion, ethnicity and social status or background with the objective to protect the fundamental human rights of all youths, promote their optimal development and well-being cum enhancement of participation in every sphere of national development processes, education via capacity building and skill development, employment creation and entrepreneurship, establishment of a National youth development fund etc. These said efforts are to engage every youth in a meaningful live style and productiveness. Unfortunately, some of the Nigerian youths, instead of utilizing the opportunities engaged in heinous activities.

Empirical review

Cultism

The term “cultism” is commonly used to refer to heinous activities embedded on destruction of lives and properties cum other nefarious behaviors which contravenes societal norms. It is a confined formal association of people committed to a uniformed purpose with reserved sacred ideology that anchors on rites centering on their secret symbols (Ogunade, 2002). Ajayi (2005), aver that cultism is a ritual involvement by individuals or groups whose membership, admission, policy and initiation ceremoniousness as well as activities are carried out in secret and meant to remain secret with all manner of negativity on both the members and non-members. Demystifying further, Azelama, Alude and Imhonda (2004), affirmed that cultism is an aggregation of persons with unit of purpose identifiable by symbols, whose rites and veneration are covered in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken. Maxey (2005), deduced the meaning of “cult” from a Latin word “cultus’ which means veneration or worship to a god or deity. Oxford dictionary of sociology (1996) cited in Rotimi (2005) defined cult as a “set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god or a small group in peculiar religious activities whose belief are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic”. It is identifiable that membership of such outfit is hierarchically structured and that gives the leaders absolute control over other members. This control entails the use of force to subdue and command members (Opaluwah, 2000). While on the other hand, secret society is considered a more matured organization with tightly-hidden activities, events, inner functioning, or membership, a little more reserved than youth cult groups. Although, these days these clandestine groups no longer hide their identity, existence and memberships, unlike the pre-digital era. However, secret society is different from surveillance, intelligence and counter intelligence agencies militia or insurgent groups that fight guerilla warfare, those sect hide their activities and memberships but maintain a public presence.

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Digitalization

The digital revolution has brought about significant changes in Nigeria's societal landscape, offering both opportunities and challenges. While digital technologies have facilitated communication, access to information, and economic opportunities, they have also provided new avenues for cult recruitment and criminal activities. Social media platforms, in particular, have been exploited by cult groups for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination of criminal activities. However, technology also presents innovative solutions for addressing cultism, including digital literacy programs, online counseling services, and anonymous reporting mechanisms. Leveraging technology effectively can empower individuals to resist cult recruitment and seek help when needed. While the internet and social media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for youth education, networking, and economic

empowerment, they have also presented new avenues and easy access for cult recruitments, radicalization, and coordination of criminal activities all over the society. Acts such as cyberbullying, online hate speech, and misinformation campaigns, online sexual abuses and harassments, paedophiling and phishing further exacerbate social tensions and contribute to the allure of cultism among impressionable youth.

Digitalization is a global acceptance on the prevalence of internet-based technologies together with digital technologies which has imbued every areas of human existence, with some traces of negative and positive evidence therein. Digitalization in this paper anchors on application of digital technologies in transformation of society and development opportunities in the farthest grassroots communities. Digitalization is an essential mechanism for excellent communication, very essential for rapid transformation. It is a process that enables easy workflow in the contemporary society. According to the result of a research conducted by Sebba, Griffths and Robbinson (2009), digitalization appears as success tool for business growth.

However, digitalized age or society as referred in this paper implies integrating information and communication technology into the mode of interaction of the set of groups concerned for effective results. This integration is seen everywhere in everyday life, especially, at work, education and all other areas of lives as digital innovations are used to achieve a better life for the society and economy.

Before the advent of digital technology, cult membership recruitment and other activities of such clandestine groups were in utmost secrecy. These days recruitments and registrations of such groups are done online from anywhere across the world an as such increase the probability of more youth involvement. These forms could be obtained and registered by any would-be members, using cell phones and other internet systems available at almost everybody's doorstep.

In the fight against cultism, technology can be both a blessing and a curse, if not well handled. While social media platforms have been exploited by cult groups for recruitment and propaganda, they also offer innovative solutions for outreach, education, and awareness-rasing campaigns. Digital literacy programs, online counseling services, and anonymous reporting mechanisms empower individuals to seek help and support in navigating the challenges posed by cultism. Furthermore, leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence can enable law enforcement agencies tio identify and disrupt criminal networks more effectively.

Community Development

Community development entails the involvement of individuals in effecting positive changes within their communities, with the aim of improving the standard of living and promoting social cohesion. It requires collaboration among community members, civic leaders, and professionals to address common challenges and build resilient communities. Youth empowerment is central to community development, as young people are key agents of change and innovation. By providing young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed, communities can harness their potential for positive development.

For the purpose of this paper, notwithstanding the broadness of the concept, we also define community development as an involvement of individuals capable of creating changes that can contribute to improve the standard of living and wellbeing of the grassroots. It seeks to empower individuals and groups of people especially, the youths with the skills they need to effect changes within their communities (Ibeh, 2005). Such skills are often created through the formation of social groups working with a common agenda. It requires understanding of individuals and how to effect change, using communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions. Community development as a term has taken off widely in Anglophone countries like, United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia, Canada as well as other countries within the Commonwealth of Nations (Ufuoma 2007).

However, community development is a broad concept, applied to the practice of civic leadership, activism, involvement of citizens and professionalism to improve various aspects of the communities, aiming at building stronger and more resilient local communities. The United Nations observes that community

development is a "process where community members come together to take collective decisions and generate solutions to common problems. It is also conceptualized as a professional discipline, following the assertion by International Association for Community Development (IACD) which viewed community development as "a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participatory democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunities, equality and social justice, through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings" (www.iacdgobal.org).

Youth

Determination on the concept of youth is dependent of cultures and societies. The advancement from childhood to youth is a systemic rite of passage with symbolic significance inherent in achieving new status manifested in community recognition (National Youth Policy, 2009). In the account of Ubi (2007), the United Nations and World Bank recognize a youth as someone within the ages of 15-24, while Commonwealth upholds the age brackets of 15-29 years. In Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) countries such as; Ghana and Nigeria, the age bracket is between 18 –35 years, Sierra-Leone, Senegal, Gambia and Mali peg the age bracket between 15 – 35 years and India adopted 15 – 34 years. All these boil down to the extent which societal norm and practices vary world over. Our paper focuses its view in Nigeria. Hence a youth in Nigeria was ordinarily defined by the Nigerian National Youth Policy 2009, as between 18-35 years. However, the 2019 National Youth Policy has changed the above position. By the new Policy, a youth in Nigeria is a person between 18-29 years. This explains why the National youth Service Corps (NYSC) is limited to graduates under the age of 30years.

Youthprenurship

Youth entrepreneurship, or youthpreneurship, offers a promising solution to cultism by empowering young people to create sustainable businesses and pursue economic independence. By fostering an entrepreneurial culture and providing training, mentorship, and access to funding, youth entrepreneurship initiatives can equip young people with the skills and mindset they need to thrive. Youthpreneurs can play a vital role in driving economic growth, creating jobs, and addressing social challenges within their communities. Through youth entrepreneurship, young people can channel their energy and creativity into productive endeavors, reducing their susceptibility to cult recruitment and criminal activities.

Amidst all the challenges, properly-implemented youthpreneurship emerges as a promising remedy to cultism. By empowering young people with the skills, resources, and mindset to create sustainable businesses and pursue economic independence, youthpreneurship addresses the underlying factors driving youth towards cultism.

Youthprenuership is an entrepreneurial culture designed to influence the youth with a view to foster personal and economic development through self-employment, generation of opportunities etc. A process that motivates the youths to establish entrepreneurial venture for the motive of becoming self-employed, an employer of labour, obtaining an alternative source of income, provide innovative and competitive products and services (Riah, 2010). In line with small business leadership (2017), youthpreneur transits into three stages;

1. The Pre-entrepreneurs stage: This is incubating or entrepreneurial stage. It is anchored under enabling conditions that promote development. A stage in which much experience is gathered in preparation for business or various entrepreneurship possibilities with orientation and awareness as key factor for success.

2. Budding Entrepreneurs: It suffice to say that entrepreneurs at this stage are youths between the ages of 20-24, who has been equipped with exposures, confidence and intensive entrepreneurial development training to establish their own business and strive for its survival.

3. Emergent Entrepreneurs: These are set of well-equipped youthpreneurs with proper experiences, capital, counselors and operational support to excel in a business environment. They have already established business but require tactical skill for growth and expansion.

This concept tends to strengthen, encourage and inculcate the initiative of how to tackle and take charge of business responsibilities in youth. It is a process of equipping the young people for the habit of self-actualization and independence as well as reduction of unemployment, crime and other social vices ravaging society. Akintola and Adiat (2013) pinpointed that youthpreneurship is an enabler for personal improvement and the zeal to perform satisfactorily. For Tope (2011), youthpreneurship anchored on attitudinal, structural and cultural aspects of a person as propellant and desire to make decisions in one's life. Youthpreneurship is not all about the exposure of the youth on how to navigate the economic responsibilities and take charge of their lives but their involvement in decision making processes or issues that matter and honor their collective resolve. This is in line with the maxim: "nothing about us without us" (Latin: Nihil de nobis, sine nobis) which is a slogan used to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided by any representative whatsoever, without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us).

Review of Extant Literature

The Nexus between Cultism and Community Development in Nigeria

Cultism adversely affects the social, political, and economic well-being of communities, hindering overall development. Addressing cultism requires a collaborative approach involving government agencies, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and local communities. Community engagement programs promoting dialogue, conflict resolution, and reintegration of ex-cultists are crucial for tackling the root causes of cultism and fostering resilient communities. Grassroots initiatives led by community leaders, religious organizations, and youth movements can advocate for peace, tolerance, and social inclusion, further contributing to community development. The aftermath of cultism are seen in the damage and destruction of lives and property of the people, circumvention of infrastructural development, criminal activities and molestation of the citizenry. These, in turn affect the standard of living in most of our communities. Cultism does not only circumvent the progress of the communities but also negates the political system as witnessed during elections in Nigeria when some politicians used them as thugs to cause mayhem.

Okewu (2006), argued that those involved in cultism are mostly youths who are catalyst of development and social transformation and whence, this act exposed them to all manner of anti-human vices that are antithetical to community development. Joining cult, dehumanizes and subjects the individual to a mortgaged lifestyle, thereby making such a person to lose his/her freedom to a group of individuals. It therefore becomes difficult for self-development which enables the individual to adapt into the society and make meaningful contributions to the development of our communities. In view of the above, it becomes extremely essential for youths to be nurtured towards a progressive, vibrant and sustainable future hence, a "trained youth is a reflection and embodiment of concerted efforts for positive social and economic production" which in turn aid community development in Nigeria. (Tawo, 2004).

Causes of cultism in Nigeria

Cultism in Nigeria has its roots in various societal factors, including peer group influence, the search for security and protection, the desire for social inclusion, and societal decadence. Peer group influence plays a significant role in the recruitment of youth into cult groups, as vulnerable individuals seek acceptance and belonging. Additionally, cultism promises security and protection to its members, creating a sense of invincibility and power. Many youths join cult groups in pursuit of social status and prestige, believing that membership will elevate their standing among their peers. Moreover, societal decadence, characterized by a decline in traditional values and norms, has eroded social control mechanisms, leading to a proliferation of cultism. To address cultism effectively, interventions must target these underlying causes and provide positive alternatives for youth empowerment and engagement.

It has become a fundamental challenge militating against community development where these unbundling young students are engaging in killing, stealing, and destructions of properties and participating in criminal activities as a result of their cult beliefs and supremacy struggles (Nwagbo et. al. 2014, Onedibe, 2012). The cause of cultism in Nigeria

can be summarized under the following subheadings.

a. **Peer group influence:** According to Ibeh (2005), (majority of those who joined cult groups are within the age of 15 and 23 years which fall under the adolescent. The period when emphasis is usually shifted from parents to peer group and social relationships, which suffice to say that these youths join cult groups due to peer group influence and pressure. It is to avoid negative stereotyping of being called "Jew guys" by their peers that are already involved. Youth who involved in cult activities as a result of peer influence are considered as placing their decision making capacity and destinies in the hand of their fellow peers (Ufuoma 2007).

b. **Search for security and protection:** In line with Thompson (1998), the youths join cult on the grand that it provides security to its members and serve as balance of terror for seeking vengeance against other cult groups when offended. This however, is a common antique employed in luring the ignorant ones into the fable of protection, hence, making them to believe that they are the most powerful, and that nobody or group can cross their path.

c. **Search for social inclusion:** There are so many youths who joined cult group to seek popularity. It is their assumption that cult membership is a way of achieving greatness, prestige and to have a sense of social class. They want to be regarded as being powerful and to make name. Therefore, by these illusions of identifying with a particular cult group they believed their social status will be enhanced and the intended fame among their age group will be achieved (Ufuoma 2007).

d. **Decadence in the society:** Generally, the falling standard of value system in our communities due to western civilization and social media influence eroded African value system of non-violence, respect for elders and constituted authorities, discipline and tolerance. Thus, youths often disregard social control mechanism in a quest to achieve personal and group ambitions. This approach to the contrary has led them to lifestyles that are against the social norms and wellbeing of their society. This quest to seek for relevance and dominance lead them into handling deadly weapons such as guns, and axes, and involving in illegal activities (Ogunbameru, 2004).

Effects of Cultism on Community Development

Cultism is a sharp contrast to socio-economic development of any community and its negative influence also affects the social aspect of life which involves culture, traditions, norms, relationship among people of the same community etc. In the light of above, we highlight some of these effects.

Destruction of lives and properties: Cultism hampers the socio-economic development of communities by threatening the lives of individuals who could otherwise contribute positively. Rivalry among cult groups often leads to violent clashes, resulting in loss of lives and destruction of property.

The negative effect of cultism has affected the contributions of such young men and women who would have created positive impact on the socio-economic development of their communities. Because of the cultists' activities, the lives of these well-meaning individuals are under threat. Cult groups are always on rivalry contest of supremacy and prominence which often results to loss of lives of their members. Such violent clashes, at times, lead to destruction of properties such as cars, houses, shops and other valuables including lives of innocent citizens.

Retardation in Educational Development: Cultist students often prioritize clandestine activities over their education, resulting in poor academic performance and a lack of skills acquisition. This hinders their potential contribution to community development. Ufuoma (2007), opined that student cultists always involve in clandestine nocturnal activities at the detriment of the educational pursuit thereby making them to perform woefully in their academics and even in learning or acquiring other skills as a result of lack of concentration. Such clandestine attitude can jeopardize the contributions of these able-bodied youths towards community development. No wonder, Udo and Ileezu (2015), affirmed that an undeveloped mind in a

healthy body is a beast which can bring destruction upon himself and his environment and cannot fit properly into the society.

Increase in expenditure to combat crime: Efforts to combat crime perpetrated by cultists divert funds away from developmental projects, impacting community development negatively. The efforts to fight crime perpetuated by the cultist derides the concentration on developmental projects hence, fund meant for community development are used to fight crime, prosecute and rehabilitate arrested and repented cultists.

Spread of diseases: Rituals during cult initiation, such as blood oaths and drug injections, increase the risk of spreading diseases like AIDS and other STDs. Additionally, drug abuse by cult members' strains medical and social facilities. During initiation, cult members involve themselves in all manner of rituals such as blood oaths, injections of hard drugs and these however, increase the chances of spreading diseases such as; Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (SDIs). Even the abuse of drugs by these able-bodied men disposes them to other deadly ailments and also makes them nuisance to the society. It further put pressure on medical and social facilities, personnel and drugs (Udoh et'al 2015).

Gaps in Literature

The empirical studies above show us that a number of works has been done on cultism. For instance, Ajayi (2005), aver that cultism is a ritual involvement by individuals or groups whose membership, admission, policy and initiation ceremoniousness as well as activities are carried out in secret and meant to remain secret with all manner of negativity on both the members and non-members. Azelama, Alude and Imhonda (2004), affirmed that cultism is an aggregation of persons with unit of purpose identifiable by symbols, whose rites and veneration are covered in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken. Also works were done on the concept of youth. In the account of Ubi (2007), the United Nations and World Bank recognize a youth as someone within the ages of 15-24, while Commonwealth upholds the age brackets of 15-29 years. From a look at all these studies, it becomes obvious that most of the write up are centered on cultism, community development, youth and youthpreneurship but a research on combating cultism in Nigeria's digital society by leveraging youthpreneurship for community development are rare and evidently inadequate.

Above all there was no specific study on combating cultism in Nigeria's digital society by leveraging youthpreneurship for community development. The study therefore fills in the gap in literature

Methodology

This paper adopted a case-study method as its methodology, involving both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The qualitative technique entails the use of documents like textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, government publications, NGO publications, internet materials and other documents while, the quantitative technique involved extracting information from the respondents using questionnaires and analyzing such data using quantitative tools and methods.

Population of the study

The population of the study is one million, one hundred and sixty seven thousand, five hundred (1,167,500), derived from four local governments which includes; Ihiala; Oru-East; Oru-West and Orlu while, Ihiala is in Anambra, Oru-East, Oru-West and Orlu are in Imo state. The choice of these local governments was embedded on the reality of cult heinous activities and youth restiveness, known as "unknown gunmen" dominant in the local governments. The towns includes; Ihiala; Azia; Mbosi; Isseke; Orsumoghu; Lilu; Ubuluisiuzor; Uli and Amorkain Ihiala local government. In Oru East, we selected; Akatta; Akuma; Amagu; Amiri; Awo-Omamma and Omuma. While, in Oru-West; Aji; Amaofuo; Ibi Asoegbe; Mgbidi; Nempi; Ohakpu; Otulu; Ozara and Ubulu. In Orlu local government includes; Orlu; Ihioma; Okporo; Amaifeke; Ogberuru and Amike

The aforementioned local governments and their populations were presented on the table below:

Table 1:

Population table of selected local governments

Ihiala	430,800
Oru-East	155,300
Oru-West	160,800
Orlu	420, 600
Total	**1,167,500**

Sample techniques

This is a procedure in arriving at a sample size, a mechanism that determines sampling unit or frame for the study. The sampling frame describes the list of population from which the sample is drawn. In determining sample size, the study adopted Taro Yamane's formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)2}$$

Where:

n = sample size (unknown)

N = Population (1,167,500)

1 = constant

e= margin of error usually 5%

To determine the sample size, we have:

$$n = \frac{1,167,500}{1 + 1,167,500\ (0.05)2}$$

$$n = \frac{1,167,500}{1 + 1,167,500\ (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1,167,500}{1 + 1,167,500 * 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{1,167,500}{1,167,501 * 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{1,167,501}{2,919}$$

= 399.97

= 400

Sample size

A population of one million, one hundred sixty seven thousand, five hundred residents of the selected communities in four local governments which includes; Ihiala; Oru-eaast; Oru-west and Orlu. Ihiala local government was selected from Anambra while, the other three were from Imo state. The population was determined using Taro Yamane's formula in arriving at a sample of four hundred (400) residents who were considered our respondents.

Reliability of the instruments

We employed the use of test reset method and also conduct a pilot test before administering the questionnaires just to establish the reliability of the instruments. The process necessitates issuing a similar questionnaire to a similar group of persons thereby empower determination and appropriateness of the questionnaires.

Validity of the instruments

The major instrument employed for this research was questionnaires issue to residents of the following communities; Ihiala; Azia; Mbosi; Isseke; Orsumoghu; Lilu; Ubuluisiuzor; Uli and Amorkain Ihiala local government. Akatta; Akuma; Amagu; Amiri; Awo-Omamma and Omuma in Oru-east. Aji; Amaofuo; Ibi Asoegbe; Mgbidi; Nempi; Ohakpu; Otulu; Ozara and Ubulu Oru-west and Orlu; Ihioma; Okporo; Amaifeke; Ogberuru and Amike in Orlu local government. Validation of the instrument was carried out by experts before administration of the questionnaires, making sure, it was in tandem with the objectives of this research.

Distribution and Retrieval of the questionnaires

The researcher was directly involved in distribution of the questionnaires. A total of four hundred (400) questionnaires were distributed while, three hundred and eighty were retrieved for analysis while, twenty (20) of the questionnaires were lost.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Tables present responses from respondents on various aspects related to cultism and community development. For instance, Table 1 shows responses on the relationship between Youthpreneurship and cultism, with 86% of respondents agreeing that Youthpreneurship can help curb cultism in their communities.

Table 1: Responses from respondents on cultism and Youthpreneurship:

Question 1: Do you agree that Youthpreneurship is a means of stopping cultism in your community?		
Responses	**No of respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	3320	84
No	60	16
Total	**380**	**100%**

Source: Youthprenuership Field Survey at Imo and Anambra States, Nigeria, December, 2023.

From the above Table 1, 320 of the persons representing (84%) of the respondents have affirmative responses. They agreed that Youthpreneurship is a means of stopping cultism in their communities. This view supports that idleness and poor positive mindset as a result of lack of productive skills are responsible for youth involvement in cult activities. While, 60 persons representing (16%) of the respondents disagreed with the idea, saying that family background and orientation orchestrate youth involvement in cultism, as such, making family background a determinant in the inherent behavior of youth.

Table 2: Responses from respondents on digitalization and cultism:

Question 2: Do you agree that digitalization is contributory factor to cult activities in your community?		
Responses	**No of respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	300	79%
No	74	19%
No Opinion	6	2%
Total	**380**	**100%**

Source: Youthprenuership Field Survey at Imo and Anambra States, Nigeria, December, 2023.

Table 2 above shows that 300 persons representing (79%) of the respondents answered "yes". They were of the view that digitalization as regards civilization and social media are contributory factors to cult activities in their community, while 74 others representing (19%) of the respondents answered "no". Their ideas contrasted with that of the first set of respondents. 6 of the respondents (2%) said that they had no opinion on the question. Based on the foregoing, it was accepted with the popular opinion that digitalization is a contributory factor to cult activities in their community.

Table 3: Responses on whether eradication of cultism can lead to community development:

Question 3: Do you agree that eradication of cultism can lead to development of your community?		
Responses	**No of respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	310	82%
No	70	18%
Total	**186**	**100%**

Source: Youthprenuership Field Survey at Imo and Anambra States, Nigeria, December, 2023.

In Table 3 above, 310 of the persons representing (82%) of the respondents aligned with the opinion that eradication of cultism can lead to development of their community, while 70 of them representing (18%) of the respondents disagreed with the idea, doubting the relationship between eradication of cultism and community development. However, the popular opinion which supported the view that eradication of cultism in the community in question can bring about development was taken.

Conclusion

Cultism poses significant challenges to both the superstructure and substructure of the

Nigerian economy, leading to increased criminal activities and other atrocities. It has expanded beyond tertiary institutions to secondary schools and other community units, fueled partly by poverty and unemployment. Youth entrepreneurship emerges as a vital tool for fostering youth productivity and combating cultism. Cultism is a challenge that has significant consequences for both the super and sub-structure of the Nigerian economy. Its concomitant effects cannot be undermined. The proliferation of these groups' nefarious activities in our communities has led to increase in the level of criminalities and other vicious atrocities. At the beginning, it operated as a secret society and their activities and operations were witnessed within the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Gradually and surprisingly, it has now crept into secondary, primary schools, and other social units of the communities. Some youths were not initiated as students they join the gang from street and ghetto. The vices of these groups could be associated with high rate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. In the South East Nigeria in particular, leaving youths idle and unproductive are more likely to get them disposed to cheap criminal lifestyle. Youthpreneurship remains a veritable tool for youth productiveness. Hence, government inability to engage the youth in gainful employment and skill acquisition have enable them to engage in activities that empowers them to challenge the social system. It requires enabling environment to build the right capacity to excel in the youth.

Recommendations

Addressing cultism requires a multifaceted approach, including investment in youth education, provision of economic opportunities, and fostering community development initiatives. Government and other stakeholders should prioritize the implementation of entrepreneurial programs to engage youth and discourage involvement in illicit activities. Cultism remains a pressing problem in Nigeria, aggravated by the continued proliferation of digital technologies and socio-political and economic challenges. However, by harnessing the transformative power of youthprenuership, and leveraging technology for positive impact and community development, there is high hope for imminent meaningful change. This approach can be made possible by investing in youth education, providing economic opportunities, and fostering community development initiatives. It will go a long way to empower the youth to reject the false promises and hopes offered them by cultism, and become catalysts for positive socio economic and political transformation in their various communities. Together with the youth in inclusion, we can build a safer, more prosperous future for all Nigerians.

Not just the establishment of enabling entrepreneurial programmes but proper implementation of the programme should be the priority of government and other well-meaning individuals in the fight against the eradication of cultism in Nigeria. This is because, with entrepreneurial schemes, youths will be motivated to put in their efforts and fan the embers of innovation that will bring out the best in them. They will also have little or no time for illicit activities and exhibit sense of belonging and inclusiveness in their efforts for community development.

The sociologist has it that family is the first agent of socialization. Therefore a lot of the social responsibilities lie with the family. Hence, parents are advised to stop exposing children at early stage of live to digital technologies such as cell phones, adult movies among others.

Government at all levels (Federal, State, Local Government) are implore to engage in reorientation, sensitizations and workshops that gears towards the usage of digital technology for entrepreneurial development skills. This should be done by transforming the school curriculum to imbue vocational education that equip the youth with the contemporary soceital entrepreneurial skills as well facilitate the interest of the youth in community development. Such programs will help the recipients to establish small scale businesses, acquire innovative and creative skills with vital experiences to contribute to the development of the communities in which they are established. These skills fundamentally lead to economic growth and development which in turn affects the community and the nation at large.

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