Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.8 No.1 March, 2025; p.g. 157 – 165; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

SOCIAL MEDIA USUAGE AND MORAL DECLINE AMONG YOUTHS IN AFRICA

NWANKWO, SAMUEL C.
Department of Theology
Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria
samuel.nwankwo@wesleyuni.edu.ng
+2349065658475, +2348038902212

ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media network, an innovation that revitalized the system of communication, interaction and dissemination of information in Africa, is a welcome development. However, access to uncensored contents, and lack of close monitoring of the activities of young people on social media, have rather affected the morality of the youths. Thus negating the gains associated with its entrant into the African soil. This paper therefore, examined how social media usage has impinged and occasioned the total moral collapse seen among youths in Africa today. Using descriptive phenomenology and sociological methods, the work observed that there is a steady departure from the moral norm and values Africans are known for, due to the misguided usage of social media. Today, African society has witnessed brain drain, increase in crime rate, debased moral behaviours, such as pornography and maturation, and the seeming erosion of the sanctity of life. The research, recommended that parents and guardians, should endeavour to monitor the activities of young ones on social media to avoid abuse. Social media should rather be used to enhance the academic performance of youths, improve their moral aptitude and interact rightly with their peers. The roles of religious leaders, teachers and policy makers, in addressing the social media challenge and moral flight of the young Africans, are quintessential to addressing the menace. All hands must be on deck in ameliorating the negative impacts of social media on youths for a better African society.

Keywords: Social media, Moral Decline, Youths, Africa, Religion.

INTRODUCTION

The world as it is today, has really become a global village. Human society has redefined the way things are done, as new inventions and innovations emerge almost on daily basis. Man now finds it more convenient to gather and disseminate information, as well as, solve complex challenges that are hitherto, not easy to handle. All thanks to science and technology for these milestone achievements that have benefited mankind in many respects.

Ogbonnia & Brooke (2020), accentuated the gains of technological innovations of mobile android devices and applications, and their contributions to bridging communication gaps. Access to these devices enables users get connected to the current events and happenings of the day, watch movies, download songs, gets educational materials or get in touch with friends and the outer world. Thus, social media have radically, influenced the way people do things, including the young ones in the society.

However, social media designated as any interactive platform that integrates and enables users gather and share multimedia elements or information, like texts, audio, animation, video and graphics, could be harmful if abused (Otubue & Oji, 2024). The categories of information disseminated through social media can positively or negatively influence the users. This equally, has germane implication on the morality of the society, especially, the youth.

Africa has high regards for her culture and religion; and takes premium in moral upbringing of her children. Unfortunately, the use of social media has affected negatively the traditional African values cherished by the people which defined her religion and culture and distinguishes Africa from other climes. The values of respect for elders, constituted authorities, honesty, industry, chastity, hardworking, uprightness, and regard for human life, are constantly being eroded due to the incursion and abuse of social media platforms (Nwankwo, 2018). Lack of control, undue and unguided access and exposure to these platforms have corrupted the very moral fabrics of the youth in Africa. Today, children of all ages, are being exposed to all forms of chat windows like: Yahoo messenger, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Otubue & Oji, 2024).

In essence, social media network is gradually becoming man's enemy, as it has assumed one of the architectures against moral expectations of the society. Myriads of social misdemeanour have been recorded among the youth, who now engage in social media for negative activities like hacking, financial frauds, identity theft and juvenile anti-social behaviour. Immoral acts like watching pornography, masturbation, premarital sex, hook ups and poor academic performance, have increased among young people in the society due to constant engagement in social media. This therefore, spells doom for the future of the African society, if nothing is done to nip the ugly trend in the bud.

The objective of this research is to examine the negative impacts of social media usage on the morality of the youth in Africa. The methods adopted were phenomenological and sociological methods, while data were gathered using secondary sources. The work discovered that social media network and its usage have occasioned the moral decline witnessed in Africa today. Laziness, lack of industry, quick rich syndrome and all manner of debased moral behaviours are seen daily, as a result of bad behaviours young people copy from the internet. To address this, all hands must be on deck.

In the next sub-heading, the researcher, shall examine the key concepts that formed the nexus of the work.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Under this sub-heading, two key concepts will be succinctly examined. They are: social media and morality.

Trottier and Fuchs (2014), see social media as several communication outlets and channel capable of reaching a good number of people at the same time. This include Twitter or X handle, Facebook, YouTube, radio, newspapers and television. In the same vein, Tomas

(2020), maintained that social media platforms enable for mass dissemination of knowledge through modern means of communication. Social media gives users the opportunity to develop their own content and as well as engage with other users (Nsudu and Onwe, 2017). It is an online platform used to build social network, enabling people to have real-life connections (Akram & Kumar, 2017). A computer-based technologies meant for easy communication, interaction and collaboration, which are digitally mediated communication software to enable users create, share and view content in publicly networked one-to-one, one-to-many, and/or many-to-many communications (Hopkins, 2017).

On the other hand, morality simply means human attempt to define right and wrong, or good and bad. In simple terms, it is the proper differentiation between what is wrong and right, a recognition of a code of conduct in ensuring sanity in a society's rules and regulations (Akindehin, and Akindehin, 2011; Lutkevich and Wigmore, 2022). Okere (2016), views morality as that quality of human life by which it can be described as good or bad, good in the sense that it must be done, or bad or evil in the sense that it must be avoided. It is a spiritual dimension of human action, conventionally approved rules of behaviour in the society (Iroegbu and Echekwube, 2005).

A decline in morality connotes a flight from moral virtues (Nwankwo, 2018). While moral virtues are good habits which incline and allow their possessors to make good moral choices. Without moral virtue, man and woman are good for nothing but public dangers. Social media usage, when not properly controlled, can bring about moral decline which threatens the very fabric of what makes the society strong. This include the desire to get rich quick, sexual perversion, nudity and loss of family values among others (Gbenga, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Researches are usually framed in theories. This enables the researcher to be properly guided, focused and modify the standardization of research concepts. The work under consideration was based on two theories, namely: Technology Accepted Model and Uses and Gratification Theories.

Technology Accepted Theory, is ultimately essential in the explanation of the social media usage and its influence on the young people in Africa. This theory was propounded by Ajzen and Fisbein in 1980. Its major thrust lies in the prediction and explanation of consumers' adoption of Information Technology to get satisfaction for essential needs and wants, (Davis, 1989). It argues that peoples' acceptance of any innovative gadget or system is predicated on the intention to use such device, which equally impacts the users' view of the innovation of the system in terms of understanding its usefulness and or otherwise.

The second theory is more like the first. Uses and Gratifications Theory, which was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974. McQuail (2010), noted that the theory could be traced back to the early 1940's when researchers started investigating why people listen to popular radio programmes and why they read newspapers daily. The theory seeks to explain the relationship between an audience and how the audience uses the media. It further suggests that people choose their media based on their needs and expectations. Thus, people

make use of social media strictly for the reasons of gratification they derive in using them. These derivative satisfaction has been categorized to include: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and escape and diversion needs (Ismail, 2021).

The two theories that framed this research are relevant on the grounds that they enable the researcher to examine the underlying reasons for media use to satisfy particular needs and how this usage influences positively or negatively to the users. The moral import or otherwise of this usage, is also predicated on motivation, and gratification derived from social media users exploring the emerging innovations.

RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO THE SOCIETY

Social media have positively impacted human society, both at the individual and cooperate levels. Mutula (2012), noted that many people use social media to reach out to their friends in various ways like emails and chat. In the same line of thought, Ikpe and Olise (2010), observe that social media increase work efficiency and speed as well as reduce cost. Relationships are build using social media, in the area of connecting with colleagues, mentors, role models and other professionals. It helps people to share expertise and increase visibility.

On education, social media, through new innovations, assist users to learn new skills such as baking, new places, news, and current affairs. It is an important source of information for academic purposes; through which researchers can connect with libraries for reference, library instructions, outreach and marketing (Salamatu 2021).

In the business world, social media have contributed greatly. It enables people to market their products, connect buyers and sellers. Using social media, people communicate and keep in touch through sharing experiences, pictures, audios, videos and all manner of information, without having to see each other face to face (Nnamonu, 2013). The litany of social media gains is endless. It cuts across all spheres of endeavour.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE MORALITY OF AFRICAN YOUTH

The fact that social media has negatively impacted the morality of youths in Africa cannot be denied. Traditional African society has high regard for moral values; unfortunately, the reverse is the case today. Through the use of social media platforms, a lot of morally decadent behaviours occur on daily bases in the society.

Pornography and Masturbation

This is one of the challenges of social media among young people today. Pornography simply connotes multimedia elements like films, magazines, writings and photographs, or any other materials that are sexually explicit and intended to cause sexual arousal to man (Ogbonnia & Brooke, 2020). When young people are exposed to such materials, there is always the tendency to copy the practice, thereby leading to masturbation or premarital sex, hook ups, prostitution. This can lead to other sexual promiscuous life seen among youth today like: homosexuality and lesbianism; practices that are abhorrent to Africa.

Loss of Value for Human Life

The sacredness, value and respect for human life are constantly being eroded in Africa today, due to social media (Onah & Nche, 2014). During emergency and life threatening situations that require assistance to victims, many people opt to record and document events for online consumption, showing wanton disregard for human suffering. Umekachikelu (2013), succinctly observed a disturbing development where people pay more attention to social media contents over basic humanitarian acts. This clearly shows the callous exploitation of tragic events and occurrences for content creation and online attention. Such attitude exemplified the instances where social media users facilitate or glorify violence, instead of caring for human life of those in danger. This situation highlights the importance and need to reaffirm the sanctity of human life in all aspects of African society.

Brain Drain and Social Media

Another negative impact of social media is the level of educational backwardness among youths today (Johansson & Hammaré, 2007). This is so because social media can affect human brain. Many young people are performing poorly in their academics due to the extended time used in social media trying to access all kinds of information. As a result of this the brain is overstressed. Rosen (2011), observed that teenagers who use Facebook tend to be more narcissistic, antisocial, and aggressive. They are susceptible to poor academic performance.

Quick Wealth Syndrome

The quest for wealth has permeated every strata of the society. This is more pronounced as young people are equally involved, using various online platforms to make money illegally. Salamatu (2021) observed that most African youths are in a rat race to get rich fast and this is mostly as a result of how their peers and idols display wealth on social media. Most people post exotic houses, cars, fancy vacations abroad, expensive clothes, shoes, and food; post the buying of expensive drinks at the club, attending rich parties, etc. All these make people especially youths jealous and envious without regard to where the wealth comes from. Today there in an increase in cybercrime, scammers/"yahoo-yahoo", and other forms of fraudulent schemes (Onah & Nche, 2014). Social media provides a safe haven for these criminals to operate, enabling the remote perpetration of crimes with impunity. The inability of the perpetrators not being easily detected, has afforded the criminals the capabilities to commit these crimes without any trace.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND INSECURITY

Social media platforms have contributed seriously to insecurity in Africa. Chinenye and Emelda (2013), exemplified this fact using the security situations in Nigeria. Through social media, insecurity is advancing in many parts of the country. The cases of terrorism and other insurgent activities are being perpetuated using social media. Terrorist groups use various kinds of online media to propagate their agenda. Through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, the heinous activities by these unpatriotic sects are reported, encouraged and supported by those who sanction these activities directly or indirectly.

On the other hand, the widespread use of social media significantly corroborates with an increase in illicit activity and the spread of false information. Philips (2015), said that the proliferation of online harassment, trolls, and hate speech has led to the emergence of hostile user environments on social media platforms. The prominence and depiction of what looks like and ideal on social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and X, has been linked to a decline in people's mental health and value for societal norms (Primack et al., 2019). These depictions may lead to feelings of inadequacy, comparison, avarice and criminal thoughts.

Various online threats exists such as cyber stalking, phishing, spam, click jacking, malware, inference attacks, and cross site scripting. These are detrimental and dangerous to online users. The possibility that these threats could assume an unprecedented dimensions in the coming years is a fact to be checked. Those who stay on social media and all forms of online platforms are at risk to the various forms of threats, such as cyber stalking, identity theft, physical assaults, and data exploitation. This is a big security threat to Africa. People should be wary of the contents they explore or the information they give out on social media as there is a high risk of hackers having access to those information to the detriment of the owners.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA THE RIGHT WAY

Discussing the importance of engaging the social media for right purposes, Oloyede & Oloyede (2022), noted that right policies must be put in place. A general re-orientation and change in the way people use social media, especially towards a more positive and developmental purpose requires that policies for appropriate social behavior and expectations be put in place. The essence of social media operators to set policies in place that do not expose them to legal problems or public embarrassment will go a long way in controlling what young people view on social media. The engagement of users with content on social media need to be measured by sophisticated analytics tools. The importance of parents, adults and guardians, teachers and religious leaders to be technologically equipped cannot be overemphasized. This will go a long way in helping them monitor what the young ones go to do on social media at every point in time, to avoid exposure to immorality, instead to be engaged with cognitive-developmental activities.

Young Africans should avoid cyberbullying while on social media. That is not the best way to use social media. Cyberbullying simply means using online platforms to intimidate, exclude or humiliate others by using abusive texts or emails, hurtful messages, images or videos, or online gossip and chat. Retaliation or response is not the best option, blocking the bully and reporting the behavior to the social media platform is rather suggested. Rules must therefore be put in place to ensure sanity and the promotion of a morally upright society and prosecuting defaulters and abusers will serve as deterrent to others (Oloyede & Oloyede, 2022).

THE ROLE OF RELIGION

Religion plays significant roles in reshaping peoples' attitude and approach to emerging issues. There are more than 10,000 distinct religions traditions worldwide. Prominent ones in Africa include Christianity, Islam, and Traditional religions (Vergote, 1996; Barrett, 2000). Religion as defined is a socio-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, a set of

beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, morals, beliefs, worldviews, prophecies, and ethics (Bloom, 2012).

Religion and morality are intertwined in Africa. It has been argued elsewhere, that it is impossible for people to be moral without religion or God, as morality is a product of religion. Religion shapes human morality and in turn human character. The tenets of religion can go a long way in controlling one's attitude in terms of usage of social media in this instance.

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of many users and will ever remain with mankind. It also transcends ethnicity, culture and religion (Chang & Heo, 2014). Africa is notoriously religious according to Mbiti (1969). Thus, Africa youth as observed are among the most active users on social media in the world. However, there appears that little or no consideration is given to the religion of users in relation to policies and terms of services on major social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and others (Baazeem, 2020). History has shown that religion can affect the consumer behaviour in respect to products where the boycotting act can come from a religious motivation (Maamoun and Aggarwal, 2008). Religions, if factored into these platforms, are likely to affect individuals' usage of social media. The role of religion should be to moderate and control people's usage of social media platform, especially, when their faith and belief are challenged.

CONCLUSION / RECOMMENDATIONS

To say that science and technology have come to stay is a truism. Technological inventions and innovations are changing human lives and ways of doing things daily. The research examined and highlighted social media usage and the eroding morality among youths in Africa. The findings show that while social media have positive impacts, its tendency to cause moral decline cannot be overemphasized. Today, youths in Africa, engage in pornography and masturbation, cybercrime, and learn all of manner of indecent lifestyle as a result of social media influence. Measures to check moral decline occasioned by social media is the responsibility of all and sundry. The paper therefore, recommends that:

The parents and relevant stakeholders should do the needful to ensure that social media and other online activities do not take the better part of the youths, thus destroying the moral fabrics inculcated in them. They should spend time with them and monitor what they do on social media.

The youths as the leaders of tomorrow, should endeavour to refrain from all sorts of immoral acts and crimes seen on social media, so as to establish a better future for themselves and the entire society.

The youths should utilize the benefits of the social media but should stay away from contents that are immorally oriented such as pornographic sites.

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