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Effects of Social Media on Morality of Youths in Nigeria and the role of Religion

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ABSTRACT

Social media provides a sense of community, where people share beliefs, ideas and knowledge. It has become increasingly popular in different countries across the globe since their invention because of its benefit in the passage of critical and vital information especially during times of emergencies but the disadvantages almost outweighs the benefits. Immorality is a serious anti-social behaviour posing threat to education, life and well-being of Nigerian youths. Cyberbullying, lesbianism, homosexualism, pornography, derogatory and disparaging remarks usually leading to violent acts have been traced to improper use of social media. A morally decadent society is on its way to ruins. This article focuses on how social media affects the morality of individuals despite its benefits as well as the role of religion in curbing this menace bedeviling human race. It also provides solutions on a saner way of using social media. Research design used to gather information includes survey, review of different literatures and observation. The study shows that social media has undoubtedly been a large promoter of vices and has led to moral decadence in our society and there is also the need to keep shared contents positive. Technology and application designers, policy makers, parents, religious leaders and youths themselves have a responsibility to act ethically in order to limit the range of immoral and inappropriate materials that young people engage with in the social media in other to ensure a proper use and a tilt towards a more responsible and morally upright society.

Keywords: Social Media, Morality, Pornography, Bullying, Youth, Religion

1. INTRODUCTION

A collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration is called Social media (Lutkevich and Wigmore, 2022). Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010) also defined social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the web which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Use of internet-based social websites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and many others which allow users to interactively communicate with one another is on the increase. Negative online risk experiences (information breaches, explicit content exposure, cyberbullying and sexual solicitations) have been reported to cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in adolescents. Teens also engage in active and communicative coping after they experience post-traumatic stress, regardless of risk type or frequency. Actively coping with stressful situations has been shown to enhance adolescent resilience and reduce long-term negative effects of risk exposure (McHugh, 2018; Kennedy, 2019).

The media allow users to meet friends, exchange ideas, images, audio, and videos, and stay connected. Hence, Verster (2010) observed that use of social media is increasingly becoming the online mode of interaction, communication, and collaboration. In Nigeria, for instance, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter are very common, especially among the youths in the country. Adaja and Ayodele, (2013) and Ciboh, (2015) observed that a major breakthrough in information and communication technology in the 21st century was the discovery and emergence of the new media which have facilitated the creation of the different platforms for social interaction with an impressive array of sophistication, efficiency, reliability, speed, accuracy, and portability made possible by microprocessors; and making life easier for a lot of people.

2. MAJOR USES AND BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media facilitates discovery of new ideas and trends, connect with existing and new audiences in deeper ways, bring attention and traffic to your work, build, craft and enhance your brand (Sreenivasan, 2016). Nigerian youths mostly used social media for communicating between their friends and families having been born in this era of emerging technology (Njoroge, 2013). Apart from socializing to stay in touch and interact with friends, family and various communities, it is a meeting point for Nigerian job seekers. Businesses also use social applications to market and promote their products and track customer concerns. In business, social media is used to market products, promote brands, connect to customers and foster new business.

As a communication platform, social media promotes customer feedback and makes it easy for customers to share experiences with a company thereby reassuring customer confidence. Crowdsourcing and audience building is another benefit of social media as it is used to gather knowledge, goods or services for young Nigerian Entrepreneurs. Companies use crowdsourcing to get ideas from employees, customers and the general public for improving products or developing future products or services. It can also be used for social media analytics, social media marketing, social customer relationship marketing, recruiting, and enterprise social networking (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media platforms have been categorized into four namely: Social networks, used by people to connect with one another, share information, thoughts and ideas, for example, Facebook and LinkedIn. Media-sharing networks, example is YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. Community-based networks, like Reddit, Blogger that focus on in-depth discussion and commenting and Review board networks that are mainly for review of a product or service. Example is Yelp where users can write reviews and endorse each other's reviews to boost visibility (Lutkevich and Wigmore, 2022). In Nigeria, popular web-based social media platforms are Facebook whch is a free social networking website where registered users create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues,

LinkedIn is designed for the business community to create networks of professionals. Pinterest is a social curation website for sharing and categorizing images found online. Reddit is a social news website and forum where site members curate and promote stories. Twitter is a free microblogging service for registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Wikipedia is a free, open content encyclopedia created through a collaborative community where user can create an article for publication (Lutkevich and Wigmore, 2022). Having highlighted, the benefits of social media, the question of its effect on moral behavior of youths must be examined.

2.1 Morality
Human attempt to define right and wrong, or good and bad is called morality or simply put the proper differentiation between what is wrong and right and recognition of a code of conduct in ensuring sanity in a society's rules and regulations. When there are deviations from the established moral conduct, degeneration and vices tend to occur (Akindehin, and Akindehin, 2011; Lutkevich and Wigmore, 2022).

2.1.1 Social Media and Moral Behaviour
Many vices have been attributed to use of social media especially in relation to morality. Addiction and overuse of social media applications result in burnout that can lead to mental health issues. Offensive posts, disinformation and deception are very common on social media. These false information that are very prominent on the social media usually with the intention to deceive causes moral decadence in youths (Kuppuswamy, and Narayan, 2010; Kennedy, 2019). Many youths are not original, creative and productive. It has been reported that health-related content on social media impacts understandings and behaviours of young people. High use of social media and technology can therefore have a negative impact on youth self-esteem (Akindehin and Akindehin,. 2011; Goodyear et al, 2018; Kennedy, 2019). This risk and potential harm to young people's physical and mental health leads to depression or anxiety symptoms. Improper Social media usage distracts teens, disrupt sleep, and expose them to bullying, rumor spreading, unrealistic views of other people's lives and peer pressure (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009; A'lam Elhuda. and Dimetry.. 2014).

Morality and discipline used to be virtues in many African settings in the times of old. Morally decadent society where immorality and indiscipline are the order of the day is a major concern in recent times. This is evident in the current level of educational backwardness and sexual promiscuity among the youths in the country as sexual immorality has become a recurrent discussion in the country majorly due to behaviours and acts emulated online, and as a result, pre-marital sex, homosexuality and lesbianism are no more vices among our youths (Johansson, and Hammaré, 2007; Griffiths, 2010; Kamaku and Mberia, 2014).

The recognition between good and bad in the social media space is blurry having no clear distinction as social media users hardly follow any moral code. Kamaku and Mberia (2014) opined that the social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook have become a raging craze for everyone nowadays and the disposition of the user as reflected by their comments, no doubt betrays their character and personality. People take advantage of the fact that they hide behind their gadgets to insult, bully, and troll individuals. A study carried out by the Australian Psychology Society (APS) on 1,000 adults over the age 18, discovered that over 60% of parents never monitor their children's social media, 15% of teenagers also reported that they have been approached by strangers online, over 30% have been bullied online while 42% of social media users are active on social media before sleeping (Grove, 2017; Katz. and Rice, 2002)

Substance abuse, cultism, improper dressing, bullying, are some of the various forms of immorality exhibited by youths caused by poor parental rearing, peer influence and most especially social media (Ngohi et al., 2020; Oyediran, 2020). Exposure to pornography has been amplified by social media leading to lack of focus, addiction, and lack of enthusiasm for activity, thus leading to premarital sex and deviant sexual behavior among viewers. The display of prostitution under the guise of '*hookup, fraud, cyberbullying'* and so many others are now a frequent phenomenon on the social media space. There are cases where lives have been lost aa a result false accusations.

A creative designer and founder of Uhuru Designz, a United States of America-based clothing company, Izuchukwu Madubueze (simply known as Izu) that was falsely accused of rape by a Nanichi Anese, caused Izuchukwu to commit suicide. When cases of such false accusation are attended to properly and the punishment for such crimes is meted out, it will indeed serve as a deterrent to people who may want to engage in such act (The Guardian Newspaper, 2020). Also, the recent sex scandal involving a female pupil and some male pupils of Chrisland Schools Lagos, in Nigeria pointed to the general indiscipline in most Nigerian schools. In some quarters, it is argued that parents must take the larger blame as opined by The National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools (NAPPS) in Nigeria while condemning the act (Sun Newspaper, 21 April, 2022).

3. THE ROLE OF RELIGION

There are an estimated 10,000 distinct religions worldwide. Prominent ones are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and many other traditional religions. Religion is defined as a social-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, morals, beliefs, worldviews, prophecies, ethics especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances. It is also seen as the service and worship of God or the supernatural and commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance (Vergote, 1996; Barrett, 2000 and 2012; Bloom, 2012; Morreall and Sonn, 2013).

It is opined that it is impossible for people to be moral without religion or God and moral conduct of any kind may be impossible without self-control. The notion that religion is a precondition for morality is widespread and deeply ingrained. In recent studies, it is argued that moral inclinations are deeply embedded in our evolved psychology, flourishing quite naturally in the absence of religious indoctrination (Barrett, 2000; Boyer, 2001). In the psychology and sociology of religion, core components of religiosity include believing, bonding (ritual emotional experiences that connect one to a deeper reality), behaving (subscribing to certain moral norms,

and exerting self-control to behave in accordance with these norms, belonging (identifying and affiliating with a certain community or tradition religious affiliation) (Barrett, 2000). These assemblages of psychological and behavioral traits and tendencies in religion may be artificial, contingent, and arbitrary, rather than grounded in any stable underlying regularities (Boyer, 2001).

The problem identified is that a beneficial behavior (prosocial) may be detrimental to the wider social group. For example, use of torture to enforce and stabilize social norms, is detrimental to the recipient (Fehr and Gächter, 2002; Herrmann et al., 2008). Also, claim that morality requires religion using evidence of (proto) moral behavior in infant humans and in other primates has been refuted (Bloom, 2012). and that religion is assumingly a cluster of features that must be culturally learned (Bloom, 2012; Barrett, 2000; Barret,2012).Oloyede and ofole also reported that religion inclination has impact in educational attainment of students but this findings is not related to moral behavior. In Nigeria, where there is strong inclination to religion, it is observed and widely reported that many so called religious leaders who are supposed to preach against or denounce acts of immorality are grossly engaged in immoral acts such as prostitution, ritual killings, fraud to mention a few. While condemning these acts, religious leaders should trace back their steps and make sure that religion as a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices plays crucial role in moral behavior of individuals (McKay, and Whitehouse, 2015).

4. BEST PRACTICES TO CURB IMPROPER USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A general re-orientation and change in the way people use social media, especially towards a more positive and developmental use requires that policies that set expectations for appropriate social behavior should be put in place. For instance in 2021, Twitter was banned in Nigeria for false and deceitful post from a user. Therefore, social media operators should set policies in place that do not expose them to legal problems or public embarrassment. User engagement with content should be measured by social media analytics tools. Adults who have a responsibility for young people's health and wellbeing-such as teachers, religious leaders and parents/guardians-must be supported to become sufficiently digitally literate for inclusive monitoring and to support young people to use social media safely to avoid exposure to immorality and made to engage with cognitive-developmental activities.

Cyberbullying can occur if online users try to intimidate, exclude or humiliate others online through 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 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.

5. CONCLUSION

Social media is web-based and mobile-based technology which is used to turn communication into interactive dialogue between organizations, communities and individuals. Improper use of social media has largely contributed to decadence of morals in our society. Nigeria, with her rapidly growing population of youth is witnessing a lot of immoralities mainly due to uncontrolled use of the social media even though social media is a powerful educational resource that should be harnessed by young people.

Vices such as derogatory and disparaging remarks, pornography, cyber bullying, and many other anti social behavior have been traced to improper engagement with social media. Stakeholders, parents, religious leaders and youth themselves should therefore be re-orientated and maintain the African cultural and religious values of good behaviour.

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