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Social Media and Moral Decadence in Nigeria

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Abstract

With the advent of the Internet, sharing of information and communication has become easier among people. Social media has created an avenue for communication but it has both negative and positive effects on the users. In recent times, a lot of people navigate the social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, and Instagram, mostly for leisure. Moral decadence is a threat in Nigeria and has become a strong issue that should not be overlooked. The impact of immorality caused by social media can be felt in our lives, economy, religious and educational institutions and the international reputation of a nation. This paper examines the ways in which social media have caused moral decadence in the Nigerian society. Internet-related vices such as cybercrime, cyber bullying, indecent dressing, pornography, glamorizing drugs and alcohol were examined. Through the use of qualitative analysis, this study shows that social media is popular among Nigerians especially the youths and it has contributed immensely to moral decadence in Nigeria.

Keyword: Social Media, Facebook, Morality, Moral Decadence, Nigerian Youths

Introduction

Social media has become fascinating to Nigerians especially the youths. Statistically, almost two-thirds (63%) of all adolescents use the Internet to go online at least once in a day. For those youths who go online, social media use is high - nearly three quarters (73%) use a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace; 38% share content online such as photos, videos or art work; and 14% blog. Additionally, three-quarters 75% of all teens have a cell phone, with 88% using them to text message, 64% to exchange pictures and 23% to access social networking sites (Lenhart et al., 2010).

Moral deterioration is reported in different societies and culture: from industrialized world to nonindustrial world. Behaviors and actions denoting immorality such as robbery, cultism, rape, drug abuse, killings and prostitution have been common among youths, adults and even children globally. Moral decadence involves any behavior or act that violates the norms and codes of a society.

The moral decadence in the society today has reached a level that calls for concern, it is a social problem because it affects the entire nation; no wonder, every community is making serious attempts to check its growth. Ihuoma (1995) observes that a society that does not check the growth of immoral practices will definitely end in a disaster. The connection between media and morality is almost taken for granted. In Nigeria, the use of social media has become common and the immorality caused by it has become a norm that people no longer see the inherent dangers. The amount of contents passed through the social media to Nigerian youths is on the increase. Thus, the Nigerian society is becoming morally degenerated especially teenagers and some adults. The power of social media which is simply globalization has overridden honesty, truthfulness, respect, decency, integrity and obedience. In a rush to acquire social media status, most Nigerians no longer cherish the moral values of the Nigerian society.

Conceptual clarifications

Social media

Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. According to Manning (2014), "social media is the term often used to refer to new forms of media that involve

interactive participation." Often, the media is divided into two different ages, the broadcast age and the interactive age. The broadcast age consists of radio and television while the interactive age consists of the social media. With the rise of the social media, instant feedback was made possible. He adds that all social media involve some sort of digital platform, whether mobile or stationary. He believes that not everything that is digital is necessarily social media and that two common characteristics define social media. The first is that social media allows some sort of participation; social media are never completely passive, even though some social media networking sites like Facebook allow passive viewing of what others are posting. Secondly, social media are participatory in nature; social media involves interaction. This interaction can be with established friends, family, acquaintances or with new people who share common interest or a common acquaintance circle.

Social media is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Carr and Hayes (2015) provide an excellent discussion and breakdown of social media as follows: "internet-based, disentailed, and persistent channels of mass-personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content". They add that "social media are internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others".

All of the above definitions focus on the interactivity of social media and how it enables users to create, share and view content publicly.

Morality

Morality refers to principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong, or good and bad behavior. It is a particular system of values and principles of conduct. It is the extent to which an action is right or wrong. Morality is the differentiation of intentions, decisions and actions between those that are distinguished as proper and those that are improper. Morality can be a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion or culture, or it can derive from the standard that a person believes should be universal. Ezekwu (2002) notes that "morality is use to denote a generally accepted code of conduct in a society that is essential to its survival and welfare". These accepted norms or codes of conduct in any society often appeal to the moral nature of man (Omoregbe, 1993, p.102). They appeal to the sense of humanity and are relevant for the welfare of the entire members of the society including Nigeria. Example are dignity in labor, respect for human lives; avoidance of stealing, rape, premarital sex, rituals, and internet scam; respect for elders; respect for rule of law and the constitution. Any behavior that is not in line with these moral codes and conducts is considered immoral. Overlooking these moral principles in a society is what often leads to moral decay like in the case of Nigeria.

Moral decadence

Decadence is defined as a behavior that shows the love of self-indulgence, pleasure and money, or process of decline or decay in society's ethical and moral traditions. It is a process, condition, or period of deterioration or decline, as in moral or art decay. Moral decay is the deterioration of morals. The word "decadence," which first meant "decline" in an abstract sense, is now most often used to refer to a perceived decay in standards, morals, dignity, religious faith, honor, discipline or skill among members of the elite of a very large social structure, such as an empire or nation state. This leads to decline in quality of life; hence, as a whole, the nation also suffers. Moral decadence leads to vices such as rape, robbery, cyber-crime, prostitution, human trafficking, sexual immorality, incest and so on.

Internet Usage in Nigeria

According to a report by Social Media Marketing Hootsuite in 2019, this is how Nigerians use the

Internet. The Global State of Digital in 2019 report discovered that there are 98.29 million internet users in the country. Compared to January 2018, there have been a 4 million increase in the number of internet users.

Of the 98.39 million Nigerian internet users, 54% access the Internet on a daily basis while only 12% (24 million) have active social media accounts. The report found that 3 hours 17 minutes is the average amount of time Nigerians spend using social media. This is higher than the global average which is 3 hours 14 minutes.

Whatsapp is the most active social media platform in the country with 85% of users. The second is Facebook at 78%. Instagram is third at 57%, followed by FB messenger at 54% and Youtube at 53% (www.pulse.ng.com).

Nnamonu (2013) aptly says that "while the Internet is the chief host of social media sites, the youths are the most predominant clients;" hence social media has become overwhelmingly common among the youths in the country. Also, Umekachikelu (2013) adds that "many Nigerians including the rich and the poor, educated and illiterate, young and old, Muslims and Christians now enjoy the services of the social media. But the youths are the major players in this sector, as they have been tagged as the digital age. Some of the common social media sites among the youths are Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, twitter, etc.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications theory:

The uses and gratifications theory was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Gurevitch in the 1974. But according to McQuail (2010), 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. The theory perceives the consumer of media fare as actively influencing the consumption or reception, since he/she selectively chooses, pays attention to, interprets and retains the media messages on the basis of his/her needs, beliefs or even his/her whims and caprices. The main question posed by these researchers is "why do people use certain mediums/media platforms and what gratifications do they get from it?" To the scholars concerned, the question of effects became tangential. The new scenario ran thus:

i. An individual has some communication or information need,
ii. He/she selectively picks the medium or media that appears likely to meet his/her need,
iii. He/she selectively consumes the content, what about effect?
iv. Well, an effect may or may not occur.

Individuals use media for a variety of reasons and these motives vary depending on one's situation. The basic assumption of this theory is that people use mass media for different reasons and seek to derive various gratification (Gallion, 2010; Wimmer & Dominick, cited in Asemah, 2011). But with the advent of the social media, it changes the way people consume mass mediated messages because they differ in context. Therefore, people who use social media and other computer-mediated communication are quite different from the mainstream media audience who relied on specific media contents (Li, 2005). Social media users have the advantage to actively select the information or content they want. Social media has changed the existing relationship between the media and the audience by altering how information is gathered and distributed. Li (2005) states that people use social media to satisfy their needs which include cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, tension release needs and medium appeal needs.

Therefore, applying this theory to the social media and moral decadence in Nigeria is of great importance because Nigerian youths actively select what information they want using the preferred media they desire (mostly social media) to satisfy their gratifications. This new media has provided an avenue for many Nigerian youths to explore the world and embrace globalization which in turn comes with some harmful effects to their morality in a quest to achieve gratification.

Benefits of Social Media

According to Mutula (2012), "Many people use social media to contact their friends using emails and chat". In offices, it is said to cut phone bills by chatting and getting news updates from the outside world. Ikpe and Olise (2010) observe that social media "possess the capability to increase work efficiency and speed as well as reduce cost". Social media is used to build relationships, and connect with colleagues, mentors, role models and other professionals. It helps people to share expertise and increase visibility. Social media educates; it helps one to learn new skills such as baking, new places, news, and current affairs.

Social media is a good source of information for academic purposes; it is used to connect with users in other libraries for reference, library instructions, outreach and marketing (Signorelli, 2012). Social media enables people to market their products; it helps connect buyers and sellers. With the 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). Social media contributes to work efficiency and business centers.

Social media "by their very nature are drivers of social change, organizational and national development" (Adaja & Ayodele, 2013,p.70). Social networking sites can allow teens find support online that they may lack in traditional relationships, especially for teens who are often marginalized, such as lesbians, gays, bi and transgender (LGBT) teens, those who are living with an illness or disability or who may feel physically unattractive or socially reticent (McKenna, & Bargh, 2000). Social media benefits are limitless, but it has also given rise to moral decadence in Nigeria especially among the youths. Some of the moral decadence caused by social media shall be discussed.

Social media and Moral decadence

Despite the benefits of social media, it has also contributed a lot to moral decadence among Nigerian youths in the following ways:

1. **Cybercrime:** This entails activities carried out by means of computer or the Internet. The computer is the object of the crime here (hacking, phishing, spamming) or it is used as a tool to commit an offense (child pornography, hate crimes). Cybercriminals may use computer technology to access personal information, business trade secrets or use the internet for exploitative or malicious purposes. Criminals can also use computers for communication and document or data storage. Criminals who perform these illegal activities are often referred to as hackers. Cybercrime may also be referred to as computer crime. In Maitanmi (2013), cybercrime was defined as a type of crime committed by criminals who make use of a computer as a tool and the Internet as a connection in order to reach a variety of objectives such as illegal downloading of music files, films, piracy, spam mailing and the likes.

In Nigeria today, cybercrime is at a rapid increase carried out by Nigerians in almost all spheres of life, especially the younger generation disregarding honesty and integrity. It is an unlawful act whereby the computer is used to physically damage or steal unauthorized information with the intent to defraud unsuspecting victims among others. In view of this, Tade and Ibrahim (2011) add that the advent of the cybercrime (yahoo boys) subculture in tertiary institutions has introduced another dimension of youth's involvement in fraud in the present day Nigerian society.

According to Check Point, a global network cyber security vendor, as of 2016, Nigeria is ranked 16th highest country in cyber -attacks vulnerabilities in Africa (Ewepu, 2016). Nigerians are known worldwide as cyber criminals. The numbers of cyber criminals caught in Nigeria and carried out by media houses are much more compared to other countries. In Nigeria, social network sites such as Facebook, Whatsapp, twitter and instagram serve as a common ground for cybercriminals to launch new tactics. Users create semi-public profiles and can directly communicate with

friends without restriction (Michael, 2014).

An example of internet fraud in Nigeria is the email type, which the fraudsters send messages via email or social media sites speculating that the receiver is a named beneficiary of a huge sum of money or an estate from a will left behind from a deceased descendant. Another one is charity funds where fraudulent people host fake social media sites soliciting for funds for charity. In most cases these fake charity sites are backed up with convincing pictures of charity works and many kind hearted people donate to these fake charity sites thereby enriching the cybercriminals. Other category of cybercrimes include: social hi-hacking which involves hacking other people's social media accounts for dubious means, and cyber stalking, etc. In effect, the norm of celebrating success without recourse to means of acquisition of wealth could be said to have endangered students' involvement in internet fraud (Adeniran, 2008).

2. **Cyber bullying:** Cyber bullying or cyber harassment is a form of bullying or harassment using electronic means. Cyber bullying and cyber harassment are also known as online bullying. It has become increasingly common among teenagers, as technology has advanced. Cyber bullying is when someone typically a teenager bullies or harasses others on the Internet and in other digital spaces, particularly on social media sites. Harmful bullying behavior can include posting rumors, threats, sexual remarks, victim's special information, or hate speech. Bullying can be identified by repeated behavior and intent to harm. Victims of cyber bullying may experience lower self-esteem, increase in suicidal thought and a variety of negative emotions responses including being scared, frustrated, angry or depressed (www.wikipedia.com).

In Nigeria, cyber bullying is endemic, though it is under reported due to the nature of it and scarcity of research in the area which made many to come to conclude that such kind of bullying is not in existence (Nwufo & Basil, 2018). Bullying has moved from physical face to face confrontation in school yard to a more psychologically damaging experience. George and Odgers (2015) note that the use of swear words (indicating rage), insults, jokes, mobility and fake names are techniques commonly used by cyber bullies.

The advent of the Internet and its frequent usage by Nigerians has made cyber bullying very common and it is possible that some youths in Nigeria are involved in cyber bullying and some Nigerian researchers have reported that. For instance, Olumide Adams and Amodu (2015) using the total number of 653 students via multistage sampling showed that 39.8% of the respondents have been bullied electronically, while 21.0% were both victims and perpetrators. Common modes of harassment were via phone calls (63.5%), chat rooms (44.9%) and text messages (38.5%). A majority of the students were perpetrators of cyber bullying and the correlates of perpetration were history of cyber victimization and daily internet use. Similarly, Ada, Okoli, Obeten and Akeke (2016) reported a high prevalence of cyber bullying in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Cyber bullying is a global problem and very prevalent in Nigeria with long lasting negative impacts on the psychological wellbeing of youths. Many victims of cyber bullying may experience technical knock-out effects throughout their life span; they may also have depression, sadness, anxiety, difficulty with relationships, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and school dropout. The rise of moral decadence in Nigeria has given rise to cyber bullies who continually affect the Nigerian culture and morality.

3. **Indecent dressing and sexual harassment**: social media phenomenon has given rise to indecent dressing and sexual harassment especially in tertiary institutions. Some of these social media sites allow sharing of videos and photos and some of these videos and photos

promote nudity and sexual harassment. Most youths look up to their celebrities as role models and these celebrities are at the fore front of promoting indecent dressing through their dressing by wearing revealing clothes, pants and bra, and sagging of trousers. As cited in Baym (2012), "just as we now see "regular" people adopting micro-celebrity tactics to gain status online, we also see famous people using similar techniques on social media sites to maintain popularity and image". Also with the "like" button on Facebook, people can do anything to get "likes". The number of likes one gets on their pictures determines their popularity. Most ladies dress half naked just for the likes on Facebook and this leads to sexual harassment because some comments will evoke provocation: for instance, "your breast looks big and delicious". Such comments are regarded as sexual harassments.

4. **Rise in pornography:** Pornography is a printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement. It is the depiction of erotic behavior in pictures or writing intended to cause sexual excitement.

   Social media has made it easy to access pornographic contents and it has become a common behavior to watch pornography by internet users especially teenagers using their phones. The more they keep downloading and watching these pornographic contents in their phones and laptops, the more morally decadent they become; they can spend the whole day watching them and not go out to meet real people, and also try to experiment what they watch with the opposite sex or even to masturbate, and this creates a bad attitude. Even at schools, they share information with their peers on how and where to download such materials; some even watch it secretly in school.

   This has given rise to immorality among Nigerian youths especially teenagers.

   M'imaita (2011) declares that three out of four teenagers say that the social media contents make it seem normal for them to engage in sexual relations, and also engineer them to be open to sex. They also influence how they talk to their girlfriends and boyfriends. Ani (2002) has observed that 'sexual immorality has become the talk of the day in the country as one is regarded as the greatest by the number of sexual partners he/she has in the name of lovers. As a result, pre-marital sex, homo-sexuality and lesbianism are no more vices among youths. Some of these social media sites allow users to share nude pictures and videos of themselves and this has contributed to moral decadence among Nigerian youths.

5. **Social Media glamorizes drugs and alcohol:** As social media connect people from different strata of life, this enhances immorality. Celebrities are signing up to connect with their fans and share their lives. Celebrities are more active on instagram, twitter and Facebook with millions of followers than on other social media. They often post pictures of themselves in different social environment, some of which involve drugs and alcohol. For example, Snoop Dog, the celebrity with the most posts on instagram poses with alcohol in 7.4% of his pictures. Some celebrities post pictures abusing drugs and millions of their followers try to emulate them especially teenagers. According to a survey conducted by The National Centre on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, teens that have seen pictures on social media of other teens doing drugs, drinking or passing out tend to copy (Baym, 2012).

6. **Increase in abortion and contraceptives**: Most youths can easily find contraceptives or sites of abortion from social media. They have access to limitless information from the social media about birth control pills and abortion procedures and this has led to teenage use of contraceptives and abortion from home based on the information gotten from the social media.

7. **Social Media encourages Infidelity and Divorce:** A lot of married couples make use of social media in Nigeria especially Facebook which is the most common and popular. Couples sometimes have issues in marriages due to infidelity by their partners which most times boils down to the use of social media. Couples start chatting with opposite sex on social media, get closer, share pictures and videos and even go on a date while still married. A research carried out by Muktar et al. (2015) about social media and divorce case shows that 79% of their respondents believed that social media can lead to infidelity and 100% of the respondents believed that social media can lead to divorce. Most court cases on divorce make use of social media to gather evidence for infidelity. Rampant cases of infidelity and divorce in Nigeria have degraded the marriage institution and the sanctity of marriage which is a clear case of moral decay.

8. **Social media encourages "get rich quick syndrome":** Most Nigerian 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 is gotten from. This has made a lot of youths go into depression and even commit suicide. This get rich quick has given birth to other vices such as kidnapping, robbery, selling of drugs, rituals, etc. in order to meet up with peer pressure and online expectations. Most youths are living a fake life online just to impress their followers and fans.

Conclusion

Technology has come to stay, and the Internet is changing our lives daily. This paper highlighted the positive impacts of the Internet and also dwelt more on the negative impacts which have caused moral decay in our Nigerian society today. Parents and relevant stakeholders should do the needful to ensure that the Internet does not take the better part of their children because, as it is, the Internet has come to stay but we also must safeguard our morality and mental wellbeing.

Recommendations

The following have been recommended to help curb internet-induced moral decadence in Nigeria.

1. Parents/Guardians should watch their children and ensure they do not spend much time on the Internet every day and also check what they are always browsing from time to time.
2. Charity they say begins at home; parents should ensure that they bring up their children in a morally acceptable way so that when they grow older they will not depart from good morals. This will help curb some immorality in the society.
3. The youths are the leaders of tomorrow; therefore, they should refrain from all sorts of immoral acts so as to establish a better future for themselves and that of the country.
4. Youths should utilize the benefits of the social media but should stay away from sites that contribute to immorality such as pornographic sites.
5. Religious and educational institutions can help train up the youths in ways that are morally right through the use of religious leaders and school teachers to guide and direct youths on the path of righteousness.
6. Traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers can continue to help propagate morality and African culture to the society by bringing up programmes that can help uplift the youth and teach them good morals.
7. Government can regulate the use of social media in Nigeria and also punish cyber thieves and cyber bullies, hence setting an example to deter offenders.

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