



SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA: A VICE OR VIRTUE

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Abstract

Social networking is a tool used by people all around the world. Its purpose is to promote and aid communication. However, this type of technology might be doing more harm than good. It is not only changing how we communicate, but how we interact with each other in daily life. With the rise of websites such as Facebook, social networking is on the verge of replacing traditional personal interactions for the next generation. Traditional interactions will continue to be at risk if we don't realize the effects of our social media. Social networking affects our lives in many ways, including our communication, self-expression, bullying, isolation, friendships, and even our very own sense of humanity.

Keywords: social media, vice and virtue

Introduction

Social networks, such as Facebook, were created for the sole purpose of helping individuals communicate. There are many other reasons that these technologies are used, but communication is still the number one. These networks not only allow communication between friends, but allow you to meet new people.. These networks are becoming the modern way to make friends. These new friends communicate through these networks. However, standard communication is not the only way this social technology is used.

On these networking sites, users normally create pages that represent them in some way. They post pictures of themselves and their friends. Their friends comment on these photos. This concept seems simple enough, but its use is very different depending on the age of the user. Adults are known to be more mature about what they post and how they interact online. Teenagers, however, use this new technology in a way that could be dangerous. In this stage of their lives, they care more about their need to impress their peers than mature reasoning. Teenagers gain popularity through the interesting pictures

they post. Comments that are left on their pages mean more to them than actual words. In order to get the results they want, they try to get a reaction from controversial images of themselves. This adolescent need to be “cool” leads to “gross amount of young girls and boys attempting to impress one another by showcasing themselves in mature situations or displaying their physique. For instance, many pictures that teenagers post online reveal underage drinking, smoking, and partying”.

With so many teens using social networking, it has become easier to target one another. Cyber bullying is a form of bullying that is only done through the web and other technologies. Social networks make it worse for the victims. Bullying is difficult in person and even harsher over the internet. When cruel comments are posted on an individual’s page, anyone can see them. However, on the networks no one is there to witness the attack. This makes it harder for a victim to ask for help.

With the constant use of these social technologies, less people are communicating in person. Many people are becoming more isolated due to the lack of personal interaction. It is becoming easier to go through life with less personal confrontations and conversations. Many people are becoming used to only conversing through their computer. This trend has continued and lead to an interesting number of developing adults that function well in a keyboard setting while failing at human interaction. The failing of human interaction is a horrible result of this new technology. Without person-to-person interaction we will lose our language skills and have trouble with public speaking. Normal debates and confrontations will be made more difficult due to the inability to read one another body language. This is not healthy for our development because “Humans are social animals who need to have regular

interaction with others to experience the full benefits of socialization and lead a balanced life”. This kind of isolation is degrading towards our society because it is necessary to be personable. These new communication sites were made to improve communication, and not to destroy it as it is been seen today.

These social networks allow an individual to have thousands of “friends.” However, these supposed “friends” are really no more than strangers. The constant use of this kind of technology is harmful to us as a whole and to our humanity. When we contact one another through these sites we are limiting ourselves. When you use networks like Facebook, “you’re representing yourself on a database. Then you live according to that database. You fill in check marks saying this is what I’m interested in, this is who I am, this is the music I want to hear, and you become a caricature of yourself”. This kind of representation lowers us and our humanity.

It is the objective of this article to present evidence from several researches that were done by many scholars in different environment that distinctly demonstrates the negative impact of social media in three main categories. First, social media fosters a false sense of online “connections” and superficial friendships leading to emotional and psychological problems. The Second harm of social media is that it can become easily addictive taking away family and personal time as well as diminish interpersonal skills, leading to antisocial behavior. Lastly, social media has become a tool for criminals, predators and terrorists enabling them to commit illegal acts. And the third analysis will consist of showing the link between the psychological problems caused by social media and criminal activities committed.

Social Network Depression

Several researchers have proposed a new phenomenon called 'Facebook depression', which is defined as depression that develops when individuals spend an excessive amounts of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression. Seeking acceptance and staying connected with peers is an important element of social life. However, the intensity of the online world, which requires constant engagement, creates a factor of self-awareness that may trigger depression in some people. As with offline depression, people who suffer from Facebook depression are at risk for social isolation and sometimes turn to risky Internet sites and blogs for 'help' that may promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, aggressive and self-destructive behaviors (Tom, 2014). Depression is one of the inadvertent consequences of excessive social media usage. For clarity, Facebook depression is not just limited to Facebook, but also refers to the impact of other social networking sites causing psychological problems. One study proving the link between depression and social media, conducted by Professor Dr. Joanne Davila, her colleague, Lisa Starr, and Stony Brook University researchers discovered that in a sample group of teenage girls, excessive Facebook usage caused the sample group to be at a higher risk for depression and anxiety. A year later, the researchers re-validated the group for any signs of depression or anxiety. The study findings proved that users who frequently discussed their problems with friends, through social media, experienced higher levels of anxiety than those who did not. According to Davilla, "Texting, instant messaging and social networking make it very easy for adolescents to become even more anxious, which can lead to depression." Clearly social media is inadvertently leaving youth susceptible to become overly self-conscious, anxious and ultimately depressed (Starr & Davilla, 2009).

A new study has found that Individuals, who engage in social media, gaming, texting, cell phones, etc., are more likely to have depression and anxiety. The study conducted by psychologist Dr. Mark Becker, of Michigan State University, found a 70% increase in self-reported depressive symptoms among the group using social media and a 42% increase in social anxiety (Becker, Reem & Christopher, 2015).

Social Media and Anxiety

In addition to being a source of depression and anxiety, social media is also a common source of stress to its users. Another survey performed on 7,000 mothers, found that 42% of mothers using the photo-sharing site Pinterest, reported occasionally suffering from Pinterest Stress (O'keeffe & Clarke-Pearson.). Obviously, social media causes depression anxiety, but how? How social media causes depression anxiety, occurs in two ways. Chronic stress causes depression anxiety. Being constantly alert for new social media messages, to your instinctive fight or flight limbic system, is the same as being on continuous alert for predators, which causes a release of the stress hormone cortisol (Jacobs, 2014).

The second way social media causes depression anxiety is from the stress produced from constantly trying to project an unrealistic and unachievable perception of perfection within your social network. The social anxiety of stress is associated with trying to project a perfect self at all times. The constant stress from constantly trying to project an image of perfection, a perfect career, perfect marriage, etc. leads to the constant release of the stress hormone cortisol, and just like social media usage, leads to depression anxiety

Social Media and Criminal Activities

Besides the emotional problems described, the second major idea covered in this article is the

enabling of criminal activities through the use of social media. With the increased use of social media, malicious and irresponsible people benefit themselves of the freedom of social media platforms to lie, scam, attack, and hurt others in a number of ways. Many criminals have taken advantage of social media to hide their identity and commit several crimes such as cyber bullying, cyber terrorism, human trafficking, drug dealing, etc

Social Media and Terrorism

Another dangerous aspect of social media is the rapid adoption of this medium by terrorists groups. In the last couple of decades, incidents of Islamic terrorism have occurred on a global scale, not only in Muslim-majority countries, but also in Europe, Russia, and the United States. Terrorism has been using social media for their benefit for gathering information, for recruiting members, for fund raising, and for propaganda schemes.

According to Weimann, terrorists started using the Internet almost 16 years ago. Ever since then, monitoring the use of the Internet and online platforms use by terrorist groups has skyrocketed from 12 to over 9,800 terrorist websites (Weimann,2008). After 9/11, many terrorist groups, such as the Jihadist movements and al-Qaida moved to cyberspace.

According to Weimann's report, terrorist groups are using social-media sites to spread their propaganda and raise funds, as well as to recruit and train new members. Social media allows terrorists to interact with each other and because it allows them to get new recruits. Terrorists also know exactly who the types of people are accessing social media are. (Weimann,2008). Social Media can also be used as a cyber-terrorism tool where the perpetrators disseminate false or compromising information using the Internet. For instance on April 2013, the Syrian

Electronic Army attacked the Associated Press's Twitter account and sent a message to millions of readers of the AP's Twitter that said "Breaking News: two explosions in the White House and Barack Obama is injured." The news was of course false. But the stock market plunged within minutes; the New York Stock Exchange dropped \$136 billion dollars. This type of cyber terrorism can destabilize a nation's economy and security creating turmoil globally.

Positive aspects of engaging in social media

The positives of social media include:

Education:

- Teachers are able to easily collaborate and communicate with students and one another.
- Students have easy, free access to resources online to help them learn.
- Grades improve and absenteeism is reduced.
- 59% of student users report that they use social networking to discuss educational topics and 50% use the sites to talk about school assignments.

Politics:

- Voter participation is increased. Facebook users said they are more likely to vote if they see that their online friends did. During the elections of 2010, users who visited Facebook more than once a day were 2.5 times more likely to attend a political rally or meeting and 43% more likely to say they will vote.
- Social media facilitates political change: Online networks give social movements a quick, cheap method of disseminating information and mobilizing people.

Awareness/Being Informed:

- 27.8% of Americans get their news online. (28.8% get it from newspapers and 18.8% from radio.)
- Information spreads faster online than any other media. More than 50% learn about breaking news on social media.
- Social networking provides academic research to everyone with online access, allowing people access to previously unavailable resources.
- Social media sites inform and empower individuals to change themselves and their communities.

Social Benefits:

- Social media allow people to communicate with friends and this increased online communication strengthens those relationships. 52% of online teens say social media have helped their friendships. 88% say being online helps them stay in touch with friends they don't see regularly.
- People make new friends. 57% online teens report making new friends online.

Job Opportunities:

- Great for professionals for marketing, connecting, and finding business opportunities.
- Employers find employees and unemployed find work. 89% of job recruiters have hired via LinkedIn, 26% via Facebook, and 15% via Twitter.
- Social media sites have created thousands of jobs and new avenues of income.

The negative aspects of engaging in social media

The negatives of social media include:

A Detriment to Work and/or School:

- Enables cheating on school assignments.
- While grades did improve for light users, the grades of students who are heavy users of social media tend to suffer. One study shows that student users have an average GPA of 3.06 while non-users have an average GPA of 3.82.
- For every 93 minutes over the average 106 minutes spent on Facebook daily, college students' grades dropped .12 points.
- Another study showed that students who went online while studying scored 20% lower on tests.
- Possible negative effects on college admission: 35% of admissions officers scan prospective students' social media and report discovering information that affects their admissions decision.
- Social networking sites harm employees' productivity. 51% of users aged 25-34 checked social media at work.
- Using social media can harm employment and prospects. Job recruiters check a prospective employee's social media accounts, and things like profanity, poor spelling or grammar, racism, sexism, poor health, references to alcohol or drugs, and sexual and religious content can all count against you.

Lack of Privacy:

- People, especially the young, are often too open and public with personal information when online. Most don't read privacy policies and may be unaware that their information may be used by third parties, like advertisers, insurance companies, and the IRS. 21% of teens

believe it is safe and harmless to post personal information, including photos.

- Insurance companies use information gleaned from social media, as well. If you have "liked" a medical-related page or a post about a health condition, that information is sometimes used by insurance companies to determine eligibility and raise rates.
- Online advertising policies are an invasion of privacy. If you "like" a brand, you're giving that company access to your personal information.

Users Vulnerable to Crime:

- Social networking sites allow hate groups to recruit and distribute propaganda online.
- Unauthorized sharing and copyright infringement threatens intellectual property and causes loss of income.
- Security attacks such as hacking, identity theft, phishing scams, and viruses are common online. 68% of users share their real birth date, 63% share the name of their high school, 18% share their phone number, 12% share a pet's name: This information might be used in identity theft.
- Criminals use social media to commit crimes. Robbers know when you're away from your home on vacation and stalkers get information about your whereabouts via social media.
- Sexual predators find, stalk, and assault victims through social media.
- Sexting (texting sexual content) can be a big problem. When teens post sexy photos or comments online, it can lead to criminal charges and child pornography. 88% of "private" sexual images posted to social media are stolen and publicly

posted on porn sites without the subject's knowledge.

- Security attacks such as hacking, identity theft, and viruses and exposure to phishing scams are common via social media.

Social Detriments:

- Cyber-bullying (the use of electronic communication to bully someone, usually by sending intimidating or threatening messages) is commonplace online, causes emotional trauma, and sometimes even leads to suicide. 49.5% of students reported victimization by bullying online and 33.7% admitted to online bullying. A 2012 study found that at least 800,000 minors had been harassed on Facebook. Middle school children who experienced cyberbullying were almost twice as likely to try to kill themselves.
- According to one report, 15% of adult users said that something that happened online caused a friendship to end. 12% of adult users said something that happened online caused a face-to-face argument, and for 3% of adults it turned into a physical confrontation.
- Less time for face-to-face interaction with loved ones. 47% of 18-34-year-old users reported using social media or texting during meals. 10% of people younger than 25 reported checking their phones and social media during sex.
- Children at higher risk for depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders and more prone to feeling isolated and disconnected (especially youth with disabilities).

Misinformation:

- Enables the spread of false rumors and unreliable information: 49.1% of users have read false news on social media.

- Encourages amateur medical advice and self-diagnosis of health problems, which can be dangerous and life-threatening.

Advertising:

- Studies have shown that sites such as Facebook influence you, via advertisements, to spend more money.
- Advertisers gain all kinds of personal information about you via your social media, information they use to persuade you to buy their product.

A Waste of Time:

- When alerted to a new post or tweet, it takes about 20 to 25 minutes for the average user to return to their original task. 30% of the time it takes two hours for the user to return to their original

Conclusion

To summarize, despite the positive benefit of rapid information sharing, social media enables people to create false identities and superficial connections, causes depression and is a primary recruiting tool of criminals and terrorists. Finally, since social media is a relatively new phenomenon and the impact studies done are also reasonably new, I feel as though the advantages of social media are emphasized quite often, as opposed to its negative aspects which are very rarely discussed. This trend must change and I hope my presentation can help galvanize it by better informing users on both sides of the argument. Although change is good, necessary and inevitable, it always comes at a price. Discounting positive impacts does not hurt in the long run, nearly as much as negative ones do. In this presentation, I have explored the harms posed by this uncensored and unmonitored new medium of communication which exposes us all to a gradual breakdown of social cohesion and the destruction of our traditional value systems, unless we take

responsibility to ensure that our understanding of social media and its impacts are constantly evaluated with what's happening in the world.

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