

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTHS

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Abstract

Nigerian adolescents and youths are the most prolific ICT savvy group of people. They are also noted to be very active users of social media in Africa, only ranking second to Egypt. While social media has no doubt accelerated and enhanced the global communication spectrum, there are concerns regarding the negative effects on the social development of adolescents and youths who are the most prolific users. This study therefore sought to examine the effects of social media use on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths. Using survey as the research design, a questionnaire was administered on 250 adolescents and youths, between the ages of 16 and 40 years old, who use social media networking sites. Findings show that 96% of Nigerian adolescents and youths are engaged in social media use either in the continuous-sporadic or the discrete-intensive mode based on motivations and interests; 98% devote a significant amount of time daily to social media use; and that the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths is influenced in varying degrees by social media use. The study concludes that social media use, if not checked, may have the potential to affect and impact Nigerian adolescents and youths negatively.

Key Words: Social Media Use, Social Development, Youths.

Introduction

Studies have shown that teenagers, adolescents and youths are among the most prolific users of social media across the globe (Terragon Insights, 2013; Ahn, 2011; Neelamalar and Chitra, 2009; Roberts and Foehr, 2008; Gigli and Genova, 2001). Roberts and Foehr (2008, p. 11) observe that with personal computers in their family rooms, laptops that they carry about and digital music players as well as cell phones in their backpacks, today's adolescents and youths are awash with social media. Neelamalar and Chitra (2009, p. 9) note that an average of six to

eight hours daily social media use has been reported for eighteen to thirty-five years-old adolescents and youths around the world, making them to spend more time with social media than any single activity other than sleeping. Consequently, social media sites represent new ways of learning, participation, engagement, and collaboration amongst adolescents and youths of the 21st Century. According to Gigli and Genova (2001, p. 2), the proliferation and globalization of media are among the key factors that arguably have shaped and defined the current generation of young people around the world.

The growing phenomenon of “media multitasking” – a social media trend that enables the usage of several media concurrently by adolescents and youths which has become the order of the day by today's adolescents and youths is also affirmed by Ahn (2011). According to Ahn (2011, p. 1435), adolescents and youths around the world spend a considerable portion of their daily life interacting through social media. In Nigeria also, adolescents and youths are the domineering internet user group. According to Terragon Insights (2013, p. 18), Nigerian adolescents and youths between the ages of 19 and 35 are the most prolific ICT savvy group of people. Nigerian adolescents and youths are also noted to be very active users of social media in Africa, only ranking second to Egypt. With so many social media platforms and so much content available as well as enhanced Internet access in Nigeria, it is not surprising that young people devote much of their time to social media. Notwithstanding, while social media has no doubt accelerated and enhanced the global communication spectrum, there are concerns regarding the negative effects on the social development of adolescents and youths who are the most prolific users. This study therefore sought to examine the effects of social media use on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths.

When a technological innovation surges in popularity, it is reasonable to be curious about its impact on human existence. This explains why social media, like other media of mass communication has attracted series of controversies and ire of criticisms. According to Jain, Gupta and Anand (2012, p. 37), a look at the world media landscape for adolescents and youths, particularly with reference to social media, presents two opposing themes - opportunities and risks. Consequently, debates and questions emerge about the patterns of social media usage and the

attendant impacts, social costs and negative effects on adolescents and youths' social development.

Proponents of the debate argue that social media platforms provide greater learning and social interaction opportunities that enhance the social development of adolescents and youths; making those who may otherwise be introverted to be confident and skillful. On the contrary, opponents argue that social media are “hijacking childhood” by diverting attention and concentration of adolescents and youths from things that will enhance their social development such as school. According to the opponents, social media are making today's adolescents narcissistic, more prone to anxiety, depression, and other anti-social behaviours such as mania and aggressive tendencies (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008, p. 1304). It is evident from both sides of the debate that social media are exercising some level of influence on the social development of adolescents and youths around the world. These arguments and a large body of theoretical constructs have sought to explain the determinants of adolescents and youths' social development. Thus, posers arise as to what are the social media use patterns of Nigerian adolescents and youths? What influence do the use patterns have on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths? It is in the quest to resolve these posers that this study is examining the perceived influence of social media use patterns on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths. Specifically, this study seeks to find out the types of social media frequently used by Nigerian adolescents and youths; examine the frequency of social media use by Nigerian adolescents and youths; determine the patterns of social media use by Nigerian adolescents and youths; and ascertain the influence of the social media use patterns on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths.

Research Questions

The following research questions were drawn to guide the study based on the research objectives:

1. What types of social media are frequently used by Nigerian adolescents and youths?
2. What is the frequency of social media use by Nigerian adolescents and youths?
3. What are the patterns of social media use by Nigerian adolescents and youths?
4. How is the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths being influenced by social media use patterns?

This field of study is important because sociability is an underlying motive of adolescents and youths' development and theme in using forms of social media. Since social media's influence is continuing to grow at a fast pace, it is important to understand the effects it has on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths. Social media offers Nigerian adolescents and youths straightforward ways of conversing with peers, acquaintances and unknown people and getting feedback that are difficult to monitor. Unlike television and other forms of media which enables parents to monitor the content their children are exposed to, social media presents challenges and has proven difficult to monitor. Therefore, how the social development of adolescents and youths around the world is being influenced by social media has become a topical issue. This study contributes to the theme by showcasing the social media usage pattern of Nigerian adolescents and youths as well as the effects on their social development.

Literature Review

Erikson's theory of human development combined with Arnett's theory of emerging

adulthood provides the theoretical framework of this study. The theory of human development propounded by Erik Erikson (1950) posits that each stage of human development presents its own unique challenges, which he called crises. Erikson believed that these crises of the ego presented challenges to one's individual identity. Therefore, successful development of the personality (or psychosocial development) depends on meeting and overcoming these tasks or crises. Explaining the theory, Enyedy, Golberg and Welsh (2005, p. 68) note that at each stage of development, particularly during childhood and adolescence, the individual is confronted with a conflict of opposing forces - basic trust versus mistrust. This implies that adolescents and youths must experience both trust and mistrust as life conflicts in order to come to a proper resolution. Fleming (2004, p. 9) observes that the theory of human development is an explanation for why children who trusts too much (is overindulged) becomes passive and dependent, whereas the child who mistrusts becomes cynical.

Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood has developed into a more contemporary stage of development for individuals in their late teens and early twenties. Propounded by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett in 2000, the theory describes adolescence as a time where there are many prospects of love, work, and worldwide views (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Arnett observes that there have been various changes in the past century, such as delayed marriage and parenting that have changed the adolescence and early adulthood stages into a more transitional time period.

Emerging adulthood, which is described as ages 18-25, is a combination of the late adolescence and early adulthood stages previously identified. It is a time where individuals are trying to find a sense of self worth while exploring possibilities of love, work, and world views (Arnett, 2000, p. 472).

Identity formation occurs during emerging adulthood as young adults are figuring out who they are as a person. Since this is a time of exploration and change, individuals may seek peer feedback to help foster their self-identity. Emerging adults use social media communication methods as they make lifelong decisions for themselves (Arnett, 2007, p. 80).

Since social media platforms allow an outlet for identity exploration to occur through peer feedback and strengthening of relationships, they are bound to create the crises of trust and mistrust as presented by Erikson's theory of human development. Also, social media platforms provide adolescence and youths with the opportunity of exploring possibilities of love, work, and world views that will enable them make lifelong decisions fostering their self-identity. The purpose of the study was to assess the effects of social media usage patterns on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths, this makes the combination of Erikson's theory of human development and Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood a relevant theoretical premise for the study.

Research has consistently shown that social media is an important element in the lives of many adolescents and youths (Boyd, 2008; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr, 2010; Udende & Azeez, 2010; Adamu, 2011). Social medial include communications outlets that connect sets of people around collective interests and allow for the sharing of ideas and observations. These platforms knit together discrete individuals and enable them to communicate recommendations, reactions, or remedies to others who have signed up at that site.

Carr (2010, p. 4) describes social medial as member-based Internet communities that allow users to post profile information, such as a username and photograph, and to communicate with others in innovative ways such as sending public or private online

messages or sharing photos online. The study of Boyd (2000) shows that these sites reveal important information about how adolescents and young adults (youths) are interacting with one another in the information age. According to the study, there are many reasons why teenagers and young adults use social media. The most popular reason is to stay in touch with current friends. In some ways, social media are a form of interactive entertainment. Internet communication leads to an increase in closeness with friends, which increases well-being (Valkenburg and Peter, 2009).

According to Bell (2010, p. 6), given that during adolescence many teens turn their attention towards peer groups, connecting with their friends is a normal part of healthy development; social media platforms just provides a simple way of connecting. The study of Lenhart and Madden (2007) note that for many adolescents and youths, sending a message through the social media Facebook, Twitter or Myspace is similar to placing a phone call or making a house visit. Majority of adolescents and youths post messages on social media on a daily basis, either by writing on someone's wall, updating their profile, sharing certain information or photos, and/or liking what others have posted (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). Wall postings are a common form of public communication. In addition, over three fourths of adolescents and youths also use the "private message" feature for communication purposes, which is similar to sending an email or a private letter (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). Therefore, social networking sites are used for both public and private communication.

In addition to contacting local and current friends, adolescents and youths also enjoy using social media as a means to connect with long distance friends. According to Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007), almost three fourths of adolescents and youths use social media to connect and keep in touch with their friends from primary and secondary

school after moving into higher institutions or away from home.

Some adolescents and youths as Dahl (2004, p. 1021) observes, also use social medias as a way to connect with long-distance family members. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn also provide a way for self-expression and identity formation. Adolescents and youths can decorate their “wallpaper” background on facebook with their unique pictures, list their interests and favourite quotes, share music and videos, and post creative photos. Since adolescence and youthfulness are developmental period when many teens explore their identities, most adolescents and youths use Facebook and Myspace as a way to disclose personal information or “try on” new identities (Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkhan, 2008). Group formation is also an important part of adolescence, and adolescents and youths use Facebook for social advocacy, because Facebook offers ways to start virtual groups online. These groups range in purpose, from aiding long-distance communication between former classmates, to fighting a cause, some Facebook groups serve as virtual memorial services for lost loved ones; while some groups are just for fun, celebrating a famous figure or a shared hobby or interest.

These attributes and usage patterns amongst other features of social media have made social media an integral ubiquitous aspect of today's adolescents and youths' life. It is as a result of the rising popularity of social media amongst adolescents and youths and the rising number of adolescents that use social media that concerns has been expressed among many people regarding the negative effects on their social development. Concerns expressed according to Sobiegaj and Berry (2011) hinge around the associated self-absorption, narcissism, and isolation concomitant with adolescents and youths who are heavy users.

Research Method

The study employed survey as the research design using the instrument of a questionnaire. The population of this study comprises all Nigerian adolescents and youths who consume the social media. Since the social media is still a relatively new phenomenon in Nigeria, there is no documented data on the number of adolescents and youths that consume it. However, considering the aims and objectives of this study, a sample of 250 was considered adequate. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Purposive sampling was used so as to get at only those who consume the social media. Adolescents and youths, between the ages of 16 and 40 years old, who use social media networking sites were sampled. This age group was chosen because they are the heavy users of internet and social media in Nigeria. The survey was done online by circulating the questionnaire through Email, Twitter and Facebook inbox messaging service. Although 250 respondents might be considered to represent Nigerian adolescents and youths, their selection cut across the entire country. The questionnaire was administered within two weeks in February, 2014. Of the 250 copies of the questionnaire, 248 were returned and used, indicating a 99.2% return rate.

Results

The research questions drawn to guide the study were answered using the data collected from the online survey. Each research question is answered using data collected in response to the question, it is presented as follows:

Rq1: What types of social media are frequently used by Nigerian adolescents and youths? Data as presented in table 1 implies that all the respondents sampled are actively engaged in the usage of social media as such, they would have certain patterns of usage.

Table 1: Type of Social Media most frequently used by Nigerian Adolescents and Youths

Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	64	25.8%
Twitter	44	17.7%
YouTub e	53	21.4%
MySpace	11	4.4%
WhatsApp	38	15.3%
2go	21	8.5%
Others	17	6.9%
Total	248	100%

This signifies that the sampled respondents would be engaged in either the continuous-sporadic mode or the discrete-intensive mode of social media usage based on their motivations and interests.

Rq2: What is the frequency of social media use by Nigerian adolescents and youths? Table 2 presents data on how often Nigerian adolescents and youths do engage in social media usage.

Table 2: Frequency of Social Media Use by Nigerian Adolescents and Youths

Regularity of Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Hourly/on the go	42	16.9%
Daily	92	37%
At least, twice a week	38	15.3%
Weekly	33	13.3%
Monthly	11	4.4%
Once in a while	12	4.8%
Others	20	8.3%
Total	248	100%

The data shows that social media usage is a daily activity of majority of Nigeria adolescents and youths, signifying that Nigerian adolescents and youths are actively engaged in social media content generation, as well as heavy consumers of social media content. Significance of this finding is that, it corroborates findings of earlier studies that

social media has become a key component of the daily lives of adolescents and youths in today's world.

RQ3: What are the patterns of social media use by Nigerian adolescents and youths? Data contained in table 3 shows that the pattern of social media usage among Nigeria adolescents and youths can be summarized to resonates around identity exploration; relationship and dating overtures; entertainment and fun; information and networking; keeping in touch with friends; and exploration of business opportunities.

Table 3 Patterns of Social Media Use by Nigerian Adolescents and Youths

Usage Patterns	Frequency	Percentage
Chatting/social interaction/networking/fun	41	16.5%
News update/information sharing	23	9.2%
Downloading video/music/photos	24	9.7%
Video, music and photo sharing	20	8%
Relationship building/dating	28	11.3%
Blogging/microblogging	21	8.5%
Product reviews/referrals	13	5.2%
Texting/sexting with friends	28	11.3%
Online discussions/interactive forums	32	12.9%
Weather forecast/sports updates	18	7.3%
Total	248	100%

The usage patterns of social media by Nigerian adolescents and youths imply that they often share experiences. Exchange ideas and influence others through the nature of their conversation about reflections on their day's events, gossip about others, including what clothes were worn and who was seen with whom etc.

Rq4: How is the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths being influenced by social media use patterns? Table 4 shows the varying influence of social media use patterns on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths.

Table 4: Influence of Social Media Use Patterns on Social Development

Influence	Frequency	Percentage
Social cohesion and unity	8	3.2%
Reduces social discomfort and discrimination	10	4%
Exposure to inappropriate content	16	6.5%
Anxiety/mood swings/ Self-doubt	13	5.2%
Overcoming phobia and stereotypes	11	4.4%
Change of negative attitudes and behaviours	10	4%
Induced fear and phobias	15	6.1%
Misconception of reality vs fantasy	14	5.7%
Respect for social diversity	9	3.6%
Education and learning	12	4.8%
Lower attachment to school activities	15	6.1%
Shorter offline attention spans/concentration	17	6.9%
Promotion social values and culture	11	4.4%
Sensitivity and alertness	13	5.2%
Early relationships/romance/ sexual appetite and arousal	13	5.2%
Blunting of emotional response/ frustration and aggression	14	5.7%
Emotional stability/healthy relationships and lifestyles	10	4%
Participation in social life	8	3.2%
Desensitization/confusion/conflict and social crisis	14	5.7%
false sense of love and sex and emotional crisis	15	6.1%
Total	248	100%

The data shows that regardless of whether Nigerian adolescents and youths use social media in the continuous-sporadic or the discrete-intensive mode, the use pattern exercises some level of influence on their social development. The table shows too that the social media use patterns of Nigerian adolescents and youths either influences them positively or negatively. The data presented shows that 40.8% of the respondents attest to the positive influence of social media use patterns on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths while 59.2% of the respondents who constitutes majority opinion in the study sample confirm the negative influence.

This collectively affirms the findings of Allen et al. (2010) that the social development of young people who devote much time in participating in online social networking would be more negatively influenced. The findings as presented in the table equally supports the observation of Udende and Azeez (2010) that Nigerian youths are increasingly becoming aloof of real life issues and loosing concentration. Also that they are tilting more towards fantasies that are detached from real life situations and may impair their understanding of social issues as well as affect their social development.

The significance of this data to the study is that besides demonstrating the various

ways in which social media use patterns influences the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths, it has established the nature of influence being exerted on them by the varying social media use patterns.

Discussion

For the large majority of Nigeria adolescents and youths as shown by the study sample, social media have become an intricate aspect of their daily lives. The most frequent adolescents and youths use of social media as shown by the study result, remains for social purposes as it engages them and provides a sense of being together with others in mediated world – either in the remote or virtual – environment. That is, the primary purposes for which Nigerian adolescents and youths use social media through mediated connections of instant messages, emails, chatting and other social activity such as blogging is for socializing and informal talks, signifying that social media has several implications for the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths. It can be deduced from the findings that social media assists in identity development of Nigerian adolescents and youths and thus influences their social development.

Notwithstanding, since social media use patterns of majority of the Nigerian adolescents and youths is unregulated, thus allowing them access to varying content and information, social media could as well be an impediment to their healthy social development. Since trends such as sexting, nudity, alcohol, or other unacceptable behaviours are dominant on social media, the lifestyles of Nigerian adolescents and youths may as well be influenced by such trends. This is because most adolescents and youths are often very concerned about expectations and evaluations of others, which means that they often rely on judgment of others to make decisions. They may as such be swayed through their social media use patterns to conform to social pressure to think and act.

Particularly for those who may be unaware of the surrounding effects embedded

in the opportunities offered them by social media, the social interactions they foster in the virtual environment may become traps for their exploitation. This is because in their quest to potentially address many concerns of adolescence and emerging adulthood, they may open up to strangers and provide information that may endanger their privacy and perhaps make them potential targets for abuse and crime. This could in turn lead to identity, social and moral crisis as posited by the theoretical framework upon which this study is anchored. Consequently, while social media sites may seem to have no immediate effect on the social development of Nigerian adolescents and youths, there are potentials for long-term effects since the study findings indicate more of negative influence than positive. Notwithstanding, the findings of the study have also indicated clearly that social media are expected to be a part of young people's live for the foreseeable future in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The opportunities for adolescents and youths in Nigeria to use social media have grown exponentially in recent years, thanks, to enhanced internet connectivity across the country and the availability of social media platforms on a myriad of new mobile devices. As these opportunities for media use have grown, Nigerian adolescents and youths have taken them up eagerly and are spending ever more time with social media each day. Most Nigerian adolescents and youths have been especially quick to adopt these new media platforms, just as they continue to integrate them into their daily lives. Majority of Nigerian adolescents and youths are as well highly technology savvy and perceive social media as often a much quicker and more convenient way to interact. Consequently, the social media use patterns of Nigerian adolescents and youths in terms of the types of messages they are exposed to, the information they share and learn, the people and products they connect to, and the creativity some of the social media afford them,

influences their daily choices. The choices in turn have significant effects and implications on their social development.

It is therefore the conclusion of the study that the social media use patterns of Nigerian adolescents and youths call for concern and needs to be checked. This is against the backdrop that social media have, and will continue to have, a major impact upon the connection, communication, and relationship abilities of today's Nigerian adolescents and youths with virtually every interpersonal context and social development of their lives significantly affected. Consequently, if not checked to moderate and mitigate the negative influences as found by the study, the reverberating effect which have potentials to impact the Nigerian society in all ramifications portends danger for the future. This is because at the moment, social media are unabatedly and increasing assuming an expanding place in the lives of Nigerian adolescents and youths, occupying more of their time than any other activity.

Recommendation

Currently, there seem to be no empirical research that quantifies the harmful influence of the content shared by Nigerian adolescents and youths over social media on their well-being and social development. However, such quantifiable data abound in studies conducted in other parts of the world (Boyd, 2008, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, Zickuhur, 2010, Morozov, 2010, Ahn, 2011). However, this study has shown that social media use can have significant negative influences on the social development of Nigerian adolescent and youths. Consequently, it is recommended that more empirical studies should be carried out on the harmful influence of the content shared on social media by Nigerian adolescents and youths.

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