
CHALLENGES AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

It is an undeniable fact that social media usage by many young people in the world is limitless. It is also undeniable that a large percentage of social media addicts are adolescents and teenage youths. The aforementioned fact is the reason for a disconnection between the youths, their parents and their classroom activities. Networking on social media is the key to survival in this global age, no doubt, and the internet is extremely useful to all of us. However, the challenges and negative effects of social media on the attitude, behaviour and the education of teenagers and young adults in the 21st century will be the major aim of this study. The study is underpinned by the theory of human behaviour, otherwise known as the Social Learning Theory, which is adopted here to explain the effects of social media on the youths. The Social Learning Theory justifies the fact that the attitudes and behaviours of young people are largely affected by what they have observed or have been exposed to on social media. The findings of this study have established a connection between inappropriate exposure of young people to social media sites and risky-behaviours, corrupt practices and massive failures in examinations.

Keywords: *Challenges, Negative Effects, Education, Social Media and Youths, 21st Century*

INTRODUCTION

Social Media sites are channels which permit any form of social communication or active interaction. These sites include Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Instagram, video sites such as YouTube and blogs in addition to gaming sites and virtual worlds, among others. The following statistics about social media sites are quite astounding:

Facebook has over **1 billion** users on a mobile device alone in the world.... Twitter, another social networking and microblogging service, has over **310 million** monthly active users...and YouTube site is frequented by over **1 billion** users visiting the video-sharing website every month...not to mention the number of active Instagram users of the mobile photo sharing network, which by June 2016, had reached **500 million** active users....(Google source).

According to the above mentioned statistics, children, adolescents and young adults are not exempted from the social networking and micro-blogging services already mentioned. In fact, the youths are permanently engaged in the aforementioned online communities or communications. The aforementioned social media sites tend to provide a potpourri of entertainment portal and communication for everyone, including the much younger children. As a result, it is exceedingly important that care is taken to limit the exposure of the young ones to these sites because many of them are unhealthy due to their contents and their use of strong or vulgar language. Via these sites, the youths are exposed to fraudsters, pornography, cyber-bullying or online harassment, inappropriate language and content, inappropriate sexual behaviour, or sexting, among others.

Social Media Usage by Children, Adolescents and Teenage Youths

The above mentioned is as limitless as it is unmonitored. It is true that the social media is extremely useful to all of us. It is equally true that networking has become the key to survival in the 21st century. Among the benefits of appropriate use of social media are therefore: creating the enabling environment for children and

adolescents to interact freely and speedily via multiple communication channels with others on the same peer group and beyond; exposing users to technical skills, offering opportunities for interactions with friends, classmates or colleagues and connecting with people all over the world without leaving the privacy of one's home. The benefits of social media also include meeting new friends on Facebook, exchanging photographs especially on Instagram, sharing entertaining and rib cracking videos on YouTube, collaborating with others across the globe and exchanging ideas on school work. Adinlewa and Adegoke (qtd in CPESR, 2017) have concurred with the opinion that appropriate use of social media can help the teenagers 'to build and develop skills and role playing ideas and some positive behaviour and decision-making skills (183).' They have also reiterated that social media can truly and 'drastically impact a teenager's maturity and growth (183).' Therefore, social media activities are not without their downside. Children and adolescents who tend to have unlimited access to social media sites are made susceptible to the uncensored vulgarity of language and sexual misconduct that pervade online sites. Ironically, such children or adolescents are less able to effectively communicate in person.

It is astonishing that more than seventy percent of children, teenagers and young adults now own cell phones or tablets to which they are addicted and are constantly using for 'texting' or 'sexting' or 'chatting, as the case may be. Therefore, a very large percentage of social media addicts (and these include children) are often diagnosed with insomnia, otherwise known as acute sleeplessness. It is an undeniable fact that lack of sleep can have very drastic effects on anybody, especially on growing children. It cannot be overemphasized that a sleep deprived child or young adult cannot focus well in class. He or she will definitely not excel in academic activities. Furthermore, he or she will exhibit symptoms of sleep deprivation which include, but are not limited to the following:

- Fatigue/ forgetfulness

- Daytime sleepiness (especially in class)/ severe yawning
- Hallucinations
- Clumsiness/ restlessness/irritability
- Weight loss/ weight gain
- Increased heart rate/ risk of heart disease/ High Blood Pressure/ Diabetes/ Stroke
- Tremors/ aches
- Growth suppression/obesity
- DEATH

Limitless access of children, adolescents and young adults to the internet will create a disconnection between them and their parents or their classroom activities.

Challenges and Negative Effects of Social Media on the Education of Children and Young Adults in the 21st Century

Although **lack of sleep** is one of the effects of social media, as already mentioned, its greatest fear is believed to be its **corrupting influence** on the users with regards to sex and violence. According to O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2007), children and young adults are exposed to 'too much sex and violence on television (16)' and this leads to a 'moral panic' in the society. The following excerpt is emphatic of the aforementioned point:

The moral panic tends to focus on the effects of media consumption on young people because they supposedly have less experience on which to base sound judgments and less developed critical faculties with which to position fiction or other media content in relation to external reality (16).

Statistics have shown that children, teenagers and young adults are the most exposed to social media. Young people, especially children, learn by mimesis (i.e. mimicking or imitating what they see or hear). Therefore, early exposure to sex and violence via social media tends

to have very drastic effects on their upbringing. Adolescents and young adults who also encounter much violence on social media will think it the best way to resolve conflicts in real life. According to Adinlewa and Adegoke (qtd in CPESR, 2017):

A considerable body of research from developed countries, particularly the USA, suggests that the visual media tend to influence a broad range of attitudes and behaviours among young people and may exacerbate risky practices....These studies have largely followed the 'media effects' model and explored the impact of the media on certain risk-taking behaviours such as engaging in sex, use of tobacco and alcohol, aggression and violence as well as such other behaviours as adopting new clothing styles and mannerisms (188).

Other negative effects of social media on the educational upbringing of children and the youths are as follows:

- **Cyberbullying or Online Harassment.** Here, false and embarrassing photos or hostile messages are relayed to users about a child or a teenager or a young adult causing the child or teenager or young adult undue stress and agitation...even self hurt or psychological or psychosocial problems which include loss of self esteem, depression, anxiety, isolation, withdrawal from classroom activities; lack of concentration in class or even suicidal tendencies. Parents only become aware of their wards' or children's online harassment when they begin to exhibit abnormal behaviour or fail woefully in class work. By that time, it may be too late to help them.
- **Sexting** entails 'sending, receiving or forwarding sexually explicit photos or videos or messages or images via cell phones, computers or other digital devices.' These images are rapidly distributed and intentionally done to cause psychological damage or trauma to a child, a teenager or a youth adult.

Alarming, pornography or nude photographs or videos of young children, teenagers or youths are also distributed online; sometimes deliberately to cause psychological injury. Interestingly, unmonitored children and adolescent youths tend to seek and find adult sites which they browse for hours rather than engage in school work or home assignments. Again, parents only become aware when a child or teenager has experienced sexual molestation or rape or has become pregnant. When this happens, the person's education is affected drastically or totally forgotten; especially if the person is a female.

- **Facebook Depression** is another challenge faced by users in that many youngsters spend numerous hours online until they begin to exhibit symptoms of depression. This is due to the exposure to unguarded and largely harmful information they encounter on social media sites. Many adolescents and young adults learn too early in life about substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices or aggressive behaviour through the internet. By the time they begin to exhibit what they have learnt, it is usually too late to positively engage them in productive ventures or in school activities.

Negative Effects of Social Media on Culture

There is a general concern and morbid fear that the social media tends to devalue a people's culture. Educators believe there is need to protect the 'young and the restless' generation against the damaging effects of foreign or western culture which is largely consumed via the magazine, the 'mass-market paperbacks', popular cinema and television (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 16). Western (and un-African culture) is particularly blamed for exposing the children and the youths to 'a diet of cheap, tawdry and corrupt entertainment (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 17).' The lives of our young children and the adolescents tend to change radically due to the

negative effects that the media can have on their behaviour. According to Adinlewa and Adegoke (2017) 'unhealthy, false and negative messages' that the young ones access on social media tend to bring them great confusion in their sexuality and in their lifestyle habits, thereby impacting them in a way that is detrimental to their growth (182).'

Effects of Social Media on Reading Ability of the 21st Century Teenager or Young Adult

According to Holte (1998), 'reading adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage.' Okeke (2000) reaffirms that reading is a priceless instrument. It is the springboard to any literacy programme and has a critical role to play in young people's development. Hence, she concludes that 'the library is a gateway to knowledge and provides books and various other resources which will help to mould the thoughts and the actions of teenagers and young adults.

Technological development has greatly hindered reading habits in our younger ones...making the habits to vanish into thin air. A child would rather spend hours browsing or surfing the net than to read a good book or to study hard for an examination. Often, such a child is under no supervision by parents who are too busy pursuing their businesses or engaging in careerism. Barack Obama categorically states (2008) that 'children cannot achieve anything in life, except they turn off the television sets,' or switch off their I-pads or their 'funky' phones.

The young adults in the 21st century no longer read for pleasure but to pass an examination. There is a great decline in the reading culture of the youths especially in tertiary institutions particularly due to their limitless exposure to the social media. The youths tend to face another great challenge in their educational growth - that of

reading and enjoying that which is read. According to Clearance Day, nothing in this world compares to reading books. He says:

The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man, nothing else that he builds ever lasts; monuments fail and nations perish. Civilisations grow and die out and after an era of darkness, new races build others but the world of books are volumes that have seen this happen again and again; and yet live on still (np).

Similarly, Michelangelo and Barbara Tuchman opine that:

Art is long, life is short but books last forever. And without books, history is silent, literature is dumb, science is crippled, engineering is at a standstill and civilization is dead (np).

Ema (2003) also believes that Social Media and Information Communication Technology (ICT) have forced the reading culture to nosedive. The aforementioned have centred on excellence and ease in education, information and entertainment but have created a lacuna in the reading culture of the younger generation. In the words of Morgan (2001), children, adolescents and teenagers have failed to realise that the world of books is 'the only place in which one can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear that it will go off in one's face...the few havens remaining where a man's mind can get...privacy.'

Sadly, teenagers and youths in the 21st century would rather play with computer games for hours, watch (Africa Magic) television channels or the cartoon network or play music on DVDs or surf the net than pick up a good book and read it. Children specifically watch their parents very keenly and emulate them too. Parents who lack the skill and culture of reading cannot motivate their children or young adults to do better in life, especially in their school work. Such parents have also failed to inculcate in their children, the habit

of 'avid reading' which leads to better relationships or better communications in life and to a more productive future.

Granted, so much useful learning can be done online but the negative effects of browsing the net far outweigh the positive ones. Besides, any child or young adult who shuts his or her book in class and at home or shuns the school library cannot develop a good reading habit. How then can such a child or young adult excel in school work?

CONCLUSION

The Social and Electronic Media can be a source of great joy to adolescents and young adults because of their numerous possibilities and entertainments but they can also be a source of great distraction to them. Lack of proper attention or adequate monitoring by parents or teachers will be the downfall of youths and of school children who are largely exposed to the social media. Therefore, inculcating a sound reading culture in our children or the insistence on the moderate use of social media is the collective responsibility of all stakeholders of education. These include parents who must gift their children with books instead of video games, the teachers who must make learning memorable in order to capture and sustain the children's attention, the librarians who must keenly watch over the children or young adults as they use library facilities and the government which must establish functional libraries across the federation for a proper reading culture. Ensuring that our children spend less time on social media and engage in reading at least one book per week, besides the prescribed texts, is a task that must be done. The golden rule to maintain here is simply that children, adolescents or young adults must be careful what they watch or listen to on social media and the parents, too, must be careful of what they permit their children to watch or listen to. This is the only way to ensure that our children grow up as responsible adults.

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