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## **SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY AS A PANACEA TO ACTUALISING FAMILY ROLE IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

The family is the smallest community and has a vital role in shaping its' members' overall development (physical, emotional, psychological, social, economical and moral) through the process of socialization made possible by parenting. The type of nurturance or socialization the individuals received from the family in turn determines how such individuals will function in the larger society. The mechanisms (internal and external) through which families realize their roles in human development have been studied by many researchers using various theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence. The present study uses qualitative method to examine the place of social media and social media literacy (external mechanism) in helping families to actualize their roles in human development.

### **Introduction**

The dynamic nature of human development makes it a subject of several disciplines (Arts, Physical and Biological sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences). Human development can be understood from diverse perspectives such as life-long, multi-dimensional and multi-directional, contextual and normative (Berk, 2007; Staudinger & Linden-berger, 2003). Development is life-long because it starts from conception until death. Between conception and death human development is influenced and assessed from multi-domains such as social (e.g. ability to make and maintain healthy relationships with members of the family and others); physical (which falls into two categories – fine motor and gross motor skills); cognitive (learning and processing of information – our thinking and knowing. It also involves language, imagination, reasoning, problem solving, and memory); emotional (acknowledging emotions and the ability to manage or regulate them in both personal and social contexts); economical and psychological domains.

This paper conceptualized human development as changes across the life span in the social, cognitive, emotional and psychological domains. The impact of changes in these domains may force the developing individual to take a particular direction (positive/ normal or negative/abnormal) within different contexts when compared

with his/her cohorts: thus the notion that human development is contextual and normative.

There are many variables which can influence how these human developmental perspectives unfold in an individual. But, this work focuses on family functioning and social media.

The primary objective is to use secondary data from theoretical and empirical reviews to show that relationship existed between: a. Family functioning and human development. b. Family functioning and social media c. If family functioning relates to human development; and social media are related to both family functioning and human development. Then effective social media literacy could as well increase family functioning for a better human development.

Efficient and positive human development are essential for societal development, therefore; understanding the ways to improve human development could be an asset to scholars and policy makers.

### **Family roles in Human Development**

The family is a micro-cosm of the society and play vital roles in determining the general harmony, growth and development of its members and the entire society. Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) stated that human beings and their environment are interdependent. Thus, reciprocal patterns occur as the human acts upon a specific context, the context adapts and changes. The now altered context once again acts upon and changes the human. Ecological model also emphasized the role of the family (micro-system) in determining the well-being of the individuals and the entire society in the ecological system. According to Bowen (1978) the family is a system in which each member has a role to play and rules to respect. Therefore, family members are expected to respond to each other in a certain way according to their roles. These roles are divided into the following:

- a. Instrumental roles: These are concerned with the provision of physical resources such as food, clothing and shelter, nurturing, socialization, decision-making and family management.
- b. Affective roles: These include provision of emotional support and encouragement to family members.

The family functioning remains balanced if there are adequate role allocation and accountability (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller & Keitner, 1993) a process that is learned and perfected through socialization. The process of socialization of the family members determines how the individual members will develop in the various domains (social, political, economical, emotional, psychological, physical and cognitive). The most important of harmonious and functional family system in individual well-being are documented in empirical literatures.

Studies showed that parenting in the family relates to academic achievement, psychosocial adjustment, psychological adjustment, risk behaviors, antisocial and aggressive child behavior (Krutson, DeGarmo, & Reid, 2004; Newman, Harrison, Dashiff & Davies, 2008). Family conflict is related to aggression, bullying and victimization,

psychological adjustment and entrepreneurial skills (Jaycox & Repetti, 1993; Nwafor, 2012; Tenibiaje, 2010).

The impacts of family dynamics on individual's outcomes in different domains of development may be mediated by the nature of socialization agents (type of family) and the forces of social change (Weichold & Barber, 2009).

Social change is the transformation of culture or social organization/structure over time. It is simply a shift in the attitudes and behavior that characterize a society (Macionis, 1997). In the modern world, the society has never been static, the social, political, economic, technological and cultural changes occur constantly with implications, including economic restructuring, changes in societal value systems, the spread of media technology, changes in educational systems and family roles in individual life. There are waves of interdependency between these changing factors. For instance, the spread of new media technologies may influence many other variables including societal values, educational modalities, economic operations, family roles, interpersonal relationships and individual lives (Buzzetto-More, 2012; Junco, 2011; Villegas, 2013)

#### **Social media, change in individual life and family role**

In the last one and half decade Nigerians have experienced the domestication of new media technologies such as smart phones and computers. Thus, akin to what is obtainable in developed nations, new media technologies are gradually embedded in the daily domestic routine and are now an intrinsic part of contemporary family life. Consequently, new media technologies have impacted on the family and the larger society in many ways (Church, Jenny, Marsha & Hugh, 2010; Mesch, 2006). The new media technologies come with other important applications and innovations (example social media).

The social media creates a platform which allows interconnections among people in which they can create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and network. In other words, social media is a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-created content (Tisone & Goodell, 2012). In creating and sharing information social media utilizes various digital media technologies such as; question- answer database, digital video, blogs, podcasts, forums, review-sites, social networking and digital photography. The created contents are then shared with the aid of the new media technologies and software on a social media platform.

It was not difficult for social media to gain acceptance in an average Nigerian's home. This is because most cooperate organizations and government agencies now utilize similar platform (network services). Thus, families see social media as a training ground for their children to learn how to operate network based services. More so, people want to be associated with global identity and social media provide an easy access to socialization into global identity (Nwafor, Obi-Nwosu, Atalor & Okoye, 2016). However, the possible impacts of social media on family dynamics and human development are well demonstrated and supported by some empirical studies and theoretical models. Some empirical studies suggested that social media

has both negative impacts (Junco, 2011; Katz & Sugiyama, 2006; Lee, 2009; Mesch, 2006; Qiu, Lin, Leung, & Tov, 2012; Ray & Jat, 2010) and positive impacts (Akram, Mahmud & Mahmood, 2015; DiMaggio et al. 2001; Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007; Yoon, 2006) on family, individual outcomes and society.

Prominent among the negative impacts of social media on individual members of a family include the following:

- a. The possibility of exposure and contact with inappropriate content and people (terrorist and extremist, pornography, cyber bullies, racist/hate-filled material)
- b. Risk of interacting beyond one's level of maturity and ability to be responsible.
- c. Increased exposure to peer pressure to keep up and conform
- d. Contamination of values in order to conform with assumed global identity.
- e. Risky disclosure of personal information such as unguarded sharing of private data with unknown people.
- f. Family members may find that users of social networking sites spend less time with them than they feel is appropriate

It is also believed among scholars that the positive impact of social media may include:

- a. Educational purposes (sharing of educational materials and information)
- b. Enhances communication skill and technical skills
- c. Create a platform for advertising and sales
- d. To promote political literacy
- e. Developing cognitive skills that are consistent with those required in educational settings and perspective-taking skills that are necessary for citizenship in an increasingly multiracial society.
- f. Positively boost self-esteem through receiving positive feedback for their contributions
- g. Reduce social anxiety through self-disclosure.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that social media can work positively or negatively on individual and society. The uses and gratification theory (see: McQuail, 1994; Ruggiero, 2000) suggested that people deliberately choose media that will satisfy their given needs which may enhance their knowledge, relaxation, social interactions and escape. It further assumed that audience play active role in interpreting and integrating social media into their own live. Thus they are responsible for choosing social media to meet their desires and needs to achieve gratification. As suggested by the theory, if individuals are actively involved in social media then it becomes easier for relatively permanent change in behavior (learning) to occur. That people play active role in interpreting and integrating social media into their own live as proposed in uses and gratification theory was further expanded in social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura.

*People are self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces.*

*Human self-development, adaptation, and change are embedded in social systems. Therefore, personal agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences. In these agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social systems. Personal agency and social structure operate as co-determinants in an integrated causal structure rather than as a disembodied duality (Bandura, 2001, p.7).*

The above fact provided some solace for what would be the solution to the negative impacts of social media. According to social cognitive theory, individuals can learn through observation, modeling and imitation (Bandura, 1986). Although, there is a dominant belief about internet contents being more current, authentic and scientific. Thus, more people tend to easily believe and imitate or model the opinion or views they observed online (including social media). However, since people can be self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating in deciding what to observe, model and imitate. A buffer factor could be added to social media variable (**Social Media Literacy**) which could possibly inoculate the cognitive domain of an individual in the triadic reciprocal causation of the causal model in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001,p. 1986). Hereby, providing a mechanism through which social media can become a positive tool for human development.

#### **Actualizing Harmonious human development through social media literacy in families**

Social media literacy includes all the formal and informal activities targeted at providing the necessary details and information about the pros and cons; facts and fallacies and unified efforts to restrict or control the contents of social media at the societal and family levels. It is generally believed that information is power. In fact, the target of most psychotherapeutic techniques such as reality therapy, logo therapy, gestalt therapy, psychoanalytic therapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy is to create some positive literacy (information) in an individual which will create inner positive psychic energy that will support the various components of selves (concept, regulation, efficacy, reflection, organization, esteem) and personality. This literacy is important in equipping the cognitive domain to selectively determine what to accept as a guide to action. Also, the social media literacy could target reactivating the government, providers or creators of social media platforms, parent, schools and other agents that can effect social change. Considering the interdependency of the different levels in the ecological system (micro, macro, meso, Exo and Chrono- systems) there must be one form of social media literacy at each level.

Most governments in the world have since acknowledged the strength of social media in entrenching negative social change. Terrorist groups now use social media platform to recruit and execute terror acts all over the world (Fuchs, 2013; Wilkinson, 1997). Consequently, different countries have increased their cyber security. This they achieve through different modalities including social media surveillance: A modality that allowed selected government agencies to collaborate with social media providers using techno-social process which allow the agencies to make use of surveillance technologies for monitoring human activities on social media (Fuchs, 2013). Bateson, Nettle and Robert (2006) found that being aware that one is watching or monitored creates hawthorn effect thus can influence one to behave appropriately.

Similarly, emic approach (Kottak, 2006) believed that every nation has a way they perceive and categorize the world, their rules for behavior, what has meaning for them and how they imagine and explain things. Thus government may as well ensure that only contents that promote positive social change are licensed to operate in the cyber space.

On their own part, parents can help their family members develop a positive and safe social media experience. This is maybe possible if the parents are educated about the technologies their family members are using and the ways to facilitate positive experience, implement protective safeguards and strategies (O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications. 2011).

This literacy could target the following areas:

- a. Since it is a fact that social media can impact the family values if not guided, families should consider developing a family online-use plan, including regular family meetings to discuss how well the plan is working
- b. Families should understand the importance of leading their members to friendly online networking sites, such as Club Penguin or Your-sphere. These websites limit the types of words that can be said, which can help tone down cyber-bullying as well as other inappropriate contacts.
- c. Parents should try and become friends with their members on social networking and have other family members do so as well. This will help the members remember that what they are publishing is not just for their peers, but can be seen by everyone
- d. Encourage the members to spend less time on the internet by providing them with more real life social interaction. Spending less time online also encourages more time with family, more time participating in other activities that contribute to positive development and learning, and less time comparing themselves to others' profiles.
- e. Talk to the members about online risks and their experiences in ways that are not invasive and that build trust. Ask them directly to let you know if they or their friends are having trouble with cyber-bullying or other forms of harassment and caution them about predators.
- f. Remind your members that not everything they see on the internet is true. This will help them deal with rumors, as well as protect them from some of the peer pressure from the presentation of online risky behaviors.

This subtle informal but consistent literacy in families will equip the individual members to develop the different domains of selves, personality and needed maturity to cope with different characters they meet in the social media. Thus, they can observe, model and imitate their family members first. This may in turn influence their choice of social media friends, what to observe, model or imitate.

### **Conclusion**

The family has some vital roles to play in individual's life. The level of socialization acquired from the family will help to determine how an individual will cope or adapt to other situations. Apart from providing instrumental roles such as food, clothing, shelter and nurturing; the family also provides affective roles such as emotional and psychological support. These roles help its members in adjusting to the forces of

social change by making them develop the potentials of accepting only positive social change which conform to the emic perspective of their society. All these are geared toward enhancing human development.

Obviously, social media can enhance these family roles. Especially, in this era where there is increasingly domestication of new technologies. While considering the possible ways social media can benefit families, there is also need to create literacy of the possible consequences that can come with social media. However, if proper literacy is created timely in the society, targeting full involvement of families in their roles in filtering and effectively redirecting their members to create balance between etic and emic, selves and personality. Then it is most likely that more people will create more valuable social media platform, subscribe for positive social media platform and become more useful for themselves, family and society at large.

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