

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FAMILY VALUES

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Abstract

This study captioned Impact of social media on family values seeks to establish the obvious fact that the evolutionary usage of the social media in our contemporary society has both positive and negative impacts on the family which is the nucleus of the society. It argues that the negative impacts are more overwhelming on the family and are negatively affecting core values of the family. Addiction to social media which cuts across virtually all age groups, cultures and nations has become the horseback upon which these negative effects ride. It has become increasingly difficult for many a family which was the bedrock of socialization to pass on their values from one generation to the other. This study follows a conceptual analytical approach in its research methodology to evaluate how social media usages have adversely affected family values. It applies two theoretical frameworks to assess social media usage in families, namely, uses and gratification theory of Elihu Katz; and the social learning theory of Albert Bandura. With these theoretical approaches it arrives at some conclusions that families in particular and societies in general should “motivate” good uses of the social media and “demotivate” bad ones. The study recommends among others a pervasive media education for families to reinstate family as the citadel of socialization.

Keywords: social media, family, values, family values, socialization.

1. Introduction

Discourse on social media is topical anywhere in the world today. They are many who flock unto their use. Yet, many more criticize their usages. Social media have become one of the foremost research topics by experts and academia. They have become topics of deliberations at parliamentary or governmental circles. Several Church documents have been written to address excesses of their usage. Today in Nigeria, the Federal Government is at loggerheads with its citizenry over usage of the social media. While Nigerian Federal Government accuse social media users of spreading hate speeches through them, users accuse Federal Government of plots to deny them of their freedom of speech. Thus, polarizations have trailed the use of social media. In family circles, the story is the same. Many families are lamenting about disappearance of family values. In fact, usage of social media has become enigmatic. It has become as much loathsome as it is cherished in families and elsewhere.

Increment in number of social media users brought about multiplication of abuses and inordinate uses; and then, many family values become lax or lost entirely. In families it has become commonplace for parents to busy themselves on the social media at the detriment of

family interactions. The same is true of their children especially young adults. Family time together, family activities like prayers, meals, discussions, and family life began a downward spiral. For some families, situations like this were common: the man is busy making business calls; the woman is chatting with friends on social media; their older children are busy with friends on video chats; and their younger children are engaged on cartoon networks. With time their shared family values became endangered.

Several communication researches allude to the fact that higher percentage of family members are now getting addicted to their social media. Some of those researches are reviewed in this study. It is yet challenging to proffer lasting solutions to the seeming tempest. As well, there are some recommendations that are suggested in this study.

2. What is the family?

Family is an accent concept. As Aderinto notes the notion of family in Africa was a byproduct of the agrarian revolution which took place some 5000 years ago. At the time, the focus on farming and animal husbandry led the people to establish settlements, and from thence, the notion of family and society emerged (2008, p. 448). In other words, from that perspective, family is a human institution established as a result of human needs for settlements. But from another perspective, family is seen as an institution initiated by divine mandate and authenticated by the traditional and legal norms of a given society. It is a divine mandate because God who created mankind gave that injunction for man and woman to unite in marriage to form a family (Gn. 2: 24; Mtt. 19: 6; Mk. 10: 9). It is based on traditional norms because communities have stipulations on what constitute a marriage and how marriages are conducted. It is legal because constitutions of nations establish the marital statutes which legalize establishment of families in the said nation.

From the foregoing it is seen that family is a group so fortified in the society. Family is often seen as mini society. Authors agree in seeing family as a miniature society or a unit of the larger civil society (Aderinto, 2008, p. 448). Family is seen as ancient social unit because its history is as old as mankind on earth. However, it should be noted that family as a concept is influenced by different schools of thought; and it is influenced by different tongues and cultures. According to Hilliard, the sociological discourse on what family stands for has been on since the later part of 1960s. Since then, many schools of thought abound on what family is. However, there has been a dominance of the functionalist approach (Hilliard, 2007, p. 1574). In spite of the dominance of this approach, it is still difficult for sociologists to agree on one definition.

So, the difficulty in having one simple definition of family has led sociologists to think of family in terms of its plural form as “families” in which sense it becomes an all-inclusive term to embrace all types of human groups that could have the name family applied to it (Allan, 2001 quoted in Hilliard, 2007); or in terms of “family life” (Cheal, 2002 quoted in Hilliard 2007); or even in terms of “family practices” with any adjective that qualifies whatever that is of family (Morgan, 1996 quoted in Hilliard, 2007). Thus, it is difficult to define family as such because the range of what is called family has grown so wide even in contemporary time. This is especially so in the western world where, as Hilliard points out, the range of what is called

family would include unmarried man and woman living together, couples of the same sex, and “partnerships” (2007, p. 1575).

That view is in line with the views of Riggs & Tweedell. They remark that lesbian unions, gay unions and so on, are increasingly being recognized as couples; and as such, some countries go as far as recognizing them as marriages, and thereby classifying them as families. Of course, there are families with man and woman and no child because the couple never had children or because those children have formed their own families; and there are families with nonbiological children of theirs (2010, p. 8). No matter one’s position on this discourse, the above classifications form what could be called family today. However, the notion of family discussed in this study is a family where there are parents and there are children. Whether the children are biological or nonbiological is not relevant; thus, family in this study is to be understood as such.

3. Family values

Here value in general will be discussed before looking at family value. To think of value is to think of what makes people do things. Of course, there are times people do things without actually thinking them through. One may not even be mindful of the reason for such action, but a person has acted to say the least. Most of such times one’s actions were guided by what a person valued or how she or he placed her or his values. As Shockley-Zalabak notes it is a person’s value that make him desire certain things and makes other things loathsome to him (2003, p. 429). According to DeVito:

A value is an organized system of attitudes. If, for example, we have a cluster of favorable attitudes pertaining to various issues relating to freedom of speech, then we might say that one of our values is that of free speech. If we have a particular value, say financial success, then this will give us guidelines for developing and forming attitudes. Thus, we will have a favorable attitudes toward high-paying jobs, marrying into a wealthy family, and inheriting money because of the value we place on financial success. Values also provide us with guidelines for behavior, in effect, they direct our behavior so that it is consistent with the achievement of the values of goals we have (DeVito 1976, p. 416 quoted in Shockley-Zalabak, 2003).

Humans, therefore, make their choices at the influence of their values. It is like a pendulum; and they follow the swing of the pendulum to the direction of their values. That is why “values can be viewed as conceptions of the The Good or The Desirable that motivate human behavior and that function as criteria in our making of choices and judgements” (Johannesen, 1983, quoted in Shockley-Zalabak, 2003, p. 429). Human choices between the good and the ugly get motivated by our scale of values. Little wonder then, why values are of utmost importance in human lives. What Shockley-Zalabak says about organizational values could be applicable to family. According to her values inform how members of an organization behave. They also influence the kind of professionalism these members would adopt while in that organization (2003, p. 431). The same is true about family values. Family values stimulate behaviours of members of the family.

Family values vary from family to family, culture to culture and nation to nation. This is to say that religious affinity and cultural background affect family values. Nevertheless, there are some family values that cut across families, cultures and nations. Family values are drawn from the cultural values of a people. Some family values are drawn from the supernatural principles or from the socioreligious worldview of the people. Family values affect choices that people make in families. In fact, everyday choices of family members are inspired by what they value. It is what they value that sets them to choose one thing at the detriment of others. As influential as values are, one might ask what are such family values that influence members? Slattengren listed a couple of such values: honesty, integrity, politeness, respect, responsibility, gratitude, generosity, to mention but a few (Slattengren, 2019). Other values from an African perspective listed by Wiens include respect for elders, and hospitability (Wiens, 2019).

Other family values include: use of family time, family get together, family interaction, family privacy, personal responsibilities in family and so on. As a matter of fact, these later family values are the ones most adversely affected by social media. And once they begin to crack, they start affecting others listed above.

3.1. Inculcating values in family

Right from antiquity, inculcating values have often taken place in families. The family has continued to be the citadel of cultural socialization. In the olden days, within the African context, families got together at the moonlight to tell stories, folklores, and songs by which socialization and assimilation of cultural and familial values took place. As Aderinto points out, the family was a determining factor for the socioeconomic and political orientation of its members as they form part of the community, such that, the character of a person is an offshoot of the family's character. For him the family has such influence on its members because "the family was a vehicle for socialization. All members conformed to certain modes or patterns of behavior that had been laid down by the family's founders or ancestors" (2008, p. 448).

As mentioned above, values are guides for people. Human choices and preferences are often influenced by a scale of values where what is valued to be more important outweighs what is not, and are therefore, chosen by a person. Family values are ideologies drawn from ethical and moral practices of a people from their culture which are eventually transmitted from one generation to another. Such ethical and moral practices are derived from people's religious beliefs, their sociocultural practices which get couched in their worldviews. Family values are learnt from religious setting, educational setting, but the truly fertile ground for learning values is the family.

3.2. Inculcating family values through traditional media

Through socialization conducted as noted above in families, family values are transferred from one generation to the other. However, the birth of civilization and the apparent disappearance of the real tales by the moonlight brought about a paradigm shift to the media age. The media that brought about this paradigm change was television. With television, families moved from moonlight to electronic screens. That was the beginning of the media age. It was at this early stage of the media age, that family started losing its control on

socialization which were done by parents and grownups as people shifted to media than the moonlight tales. Though parental control was weakened by television screens, television did not diminish the family as the citadel of socialization.

Tales by the moonlight shifted to television screens. The emergence of some soap operas on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) channels, and the famous Masquerades created by James Iroha a.k.a. Gringory gradually became the virtual moonlights that replaced the real one. Though the Masquerade is off the air now, there are several soap operas on the Nigerian and foreign channels that have lots of family values to impart on people. A challenge parents had then was knowing how to control what family members especially minors watched on televisions. As Mueller points out, television has something to teach both adults and young people: "While television can and does educate viewers in positive and constructive ways, there are some alarming trends. Children and teens, as they move through the crucial developmental states of childhood and adolescence, are especially susceptible to television's negative and destructive themes and messages" (1999, p. 139). But parents had and still have some control on family television screens when they use media for inculcation of family values.

3.3. Inculcating family values through social media

Today things have gone overboard with the social media. The biggest challenge for families in the 21st Century is the use of the social media. Unlike televisions where the "destructive themes" can be controlled, it is hard to place a hold on the social media. Their fluidity beats imagination. As Mitchell, Brown & Guskin (2012) point out, at the birth of the social media, experts from all walks of life had thought that the new media would be a sure hope for unity among people and a strong boost to democracy. But after a score of years of people using these new media it is apparent those dreams have become elusive. From everywhere around the world evidences abound of isolations and polarizations amongst people created as a result of the social media (quoted in Ademosu & Oyeleye, 2019, p. 74).

When social media were coming on board on the communication platforms, they were primarily created to build community, to improve people's interactions, to facilitate sharing of online materials more effectively and to engender better relationship (Rouse, 2019). Of course, stories abound of men and women who met on social media, formed relationships which resulted in being families. Apart from enabling couples initiate family lives, social media could boost the interaction of those couples who live apart. Social media can enable working-class couples to be together while they are separated by their works. But then, social media which were thought to be unifying factor for humanity have become largely divisive. They were thought to be constructive in aiding interactions, but they became chiefly destructive. The worrisome concerns told about social media in the political scene are the same in family circles. If social media were to improve on people's interactions as Rouse mentioned above, perhaps, one thinks they would have become new paradigm for inculcating family values.

It is not that social media do not achieve their intended objectives somehow. No, far from it. The issue is that social media create and build more virtual communities and relationships at the detriment of natural ones. In fact, according to Singh (2015) major issues with social media

are that they take up most, if not all, of family's regular healthy discussions; they deny families their time for common activities; they make people get addicted to them; they lead families to interact poorly; they give children easy exposure to adult materials; they induce people into short attention span in family activities; they make both adults and young people stay up all night – only to be drowsy by morning, and perhaps, through the day. Adamson (2017) points out similar danger areas of social media usage in families: they become sources of distractions in family interactions than building deeper family bonding; they easily expose family privacy since materials shared on social media are almost shared on a public square; and there is a potential danger of over-interacting with those outside of one's natural family; and all those bring disintegration in the natural relationship.

From the foregoing, it is clear that getting addicted to them is the bane of social media users. To illustrate this addiction, Lyons (2019) reports a study conducted by Kaiser Family Foundation which found that children between 8-18 years of age were already spending 7 hours daily with some kind of electronic media. In other words, in a week, children using the social media would have spent approximately fifty hours of their time watching some kind of media. Those reports are similar to researches conducted by Robb which found that in 2016 about 29% of parents spent too much time on the media, but in 2019 it rose to 52% of parents who spend too much time on social media. Then in 2016 29% of parents felt addicted to their media, but in 2019 it rose to 76% (Robb, 2019, p. 13). The jump in three years is tremendous. According to Lyons when children concentrate on the screens, they do that at the detriment of learning personal skills that would aid their relationships with their parents and others around them. As Lyons claims, amount of time children spend on screens can lead to become overweight for lack of exercise. It can lead them to develop difficulty focusing; or even to have difficulty in relating with family members (Lyons, 2019). This difficulty comes as a result of the person's attention being consumed by the media. In other words, paying attention to studies, for instance, or interacting with parents becomes partially out of place. If it could happen to children, it happens to adults. Lappe (2015) states a known fact that children get influenced by how their parents are consumed by the media; and they copy their parents.

Every single one of the circumstances mentioned above have adverse effects on inculcating family values today because they come against the communicative opportunities of families to do that. In practical terms, they present circumstances where parents come home, and are preoccupied by with their chats on social media, and as a result do not have time to talk with their children, probably, till bedtime. How then can values be inculcated to through the social media?

However, if social media could serve as tools for socialization in families, they may have to be used differently. Here are some tips by Adamson on how to make balanced use of the social media:

- a) Do not draw relational comparison between social media relationships and one's already established natural family relationships. It is better to compare present condition of family relationships with the family's past than to compare with those on the media.

- b) Utilize quality time to build your real relationship. It is important to find and do things or family activities that would draw family members closer to each other.
- c) Sharing social media activities with family will increase family bonding than running a separate social media activity (Adamson, 2017).

4. Application of theoretical approaches

There is no gainsaying the fact that social media have both positive and negative impacts on users; and that the negative impacts seem to outweigh the positive impacts. As a matter of fact, the recurrent decimal with social media, however, is the issue of addicted users. Why are many social media users addicted to them? Application of uses and gratification theory of media effects is at the heart of this puzzle. This theory goes a long way to prove that media users are not passive observers who are just there glued to their television sets or handset or other media available to them. This theory argues that media users are mindful of what media they need and what programmes they need from such media for their gratifications. Though the theory has been modified by scholars over the years, according to Nwachukwu, Asadu & Asak (2013, p. 58), it rose as a kind of opposing view against the dominant view of the 1930s which saw audience participation in media use as passive; and therefore, assumes that a principal use of the media is to assert persuasion on media users.

Uses and gratification theory explains how people use the media for gratification of their needs. It tries to discover motives behind media uses by people. It also tries to identify positive and negative uses of the media (Asak & Ohiagu, 2013, p. 71). Providing further explanations on how this theory developed, McQuail remarks that the studies of Lazarsfeld & Stanton by 1944, 1949 revealed that 'soap operas' were resourceful to listeners who were mostly women. These studies found soap operas to provide listeners with pieces of advice and emotional support. Soap operas took the place of role-modeling for their audience which were mostly housewives and mothers. Studies by Herzog (1944) and Warner & Henry (1948) confirmed the same findings of the above authors (quoted in McQuail, 2010, p. 351). All those go a long way to prove that media users are by no means passive audience. Users make their choices of what media to use, how to use them and when to use them.

In the contributions of Katz, Gurevitch & Hass (1973) they identify the felt needs for which media users try to satisfy with their usage. For easy comprehension these felt needs were compressed to five, and they are: cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integration needs, social integration needs, and tension release needs (quoted in Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017, p. 69-70). This is to say that human media needs are grouped into above named areas, and users apply media or in this case social media to satisfy such felt needs in their lives. This theory established the fact that media users have felt human needs they want to use media to satisfy. This was lauded by authors. It was a prominent landmark in the communication industry. It made scientists and practitioners to understand clearly the fact that human felt media needs are of importance in the process of media production and communication; that users choose media contents they need, that they make meaning out of their chosen media and that they act upon the meaning they drew from the media (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017, p. 72). On the other hand, however, a major criticism of this theory is that its dominant argument which perceived media users as active participants seems to absolve the media industry from effects of negative media contents

(Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017, p. 73). Be that as it may, however, to a large extent the issue of corporate responsibility should call the media industry to share on the negative effects of media especially for all the challenges of social media.

Another theory applicable to this study is the Social Learning Theory (SLT). Bandura's (1986) social learning theory (SLT) which is also known as Observational Learning Theory (OLT) is a media theory efficient for the effects of media on audience particularly if the audience in question are children or young adults. As the name implies, this theory states the obvious about human cognitive ability to learn from observations. As McQuail (2010, p. 410) explains, Bandura's theory is a learning ability that is divergent in the sense that humans have ability to learn from both "direct" and "indirect" observations. Humans learn "from direct personal observation and experience" and also "from indirect sources, including the mass media". Nwachukwu, Asadu & Asak (2013, p. 103) note that Bandura built his theory upon observable reactions of children who were exposed to media characters in the video clips of "a three-foot-tall pop-up clown" called "Bobo". The said children who watched the video clip reacted to the live Bobo in similar ways to how they saw media characters treat Bobo in the clips. Those who watched the clip where media characters accepted Bobo were more receptive to it than those who watched where media characters were more hostile to it. Bandura thus, saw the media characters the children were exposed to as stimulating the children's reaction. As a result of this observation, McQuail explains that:

Bandura's model posits four basic processes of social learning that occur in sequence: attention, retention, production and motivation. Our attention is directed at media content of potential relevance to our lives and personal needs and interests. We may then retain what we have learnt and add it to our stock of prior knowledge. The third stage – that of production – refers to the actual application in behaviour of lessons learnt, where it may be rewarded (reinforced) or punished, leading to greater or less motivation to follow any particular path (McQuail, 2010, p. 410).

From the foregoing, it is understandable that people retain what they observe from the media, and such media effects impact their behaviour. What is more, if such behaviour as impacted by the media is approved or disapproved by others in the society, such media users get motivated or demotivated as the case maybe – to continue with such media impacted behaviour. Defleur & Rokeach (1989) share the same opinion as they explain Bandura's theory affirming that, in general terms, the theory show how people's behaviours are affected by behaviours of others in the society and in the media, and how those behaviours get modeled by them (quoted in Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, p. 118). Being motivated or demotivated is an interesting aspect of this theory; and forms the foundation of the contribution of this theory.

The major claim of this theory is that media have social effects on users who see media characters as models; and hence, end up behaving like those media characters. McQuail notes that though those media influences are expressed in media users' daily lifestyles seen in their dress-codes, looks, and so on, behaviours of media users should not be understood as

imitation or mimicry of media characters (2010, p. 410). That is a way of saying that when media users appear like or do similar things as characters in the media, they do it with some conviction of following example of the masters or models. Therefore, media users are convinced that characters in the media are models to be followed, and they follow it – unless some disapproval is given by the society. On the impetus of approval or disapproval that can come from the society, this study argues that media effects should not dominate social behaviours of people. McQuail supports this view when he argues that “Mass media are rarely the only source of social learning and their influence depends on other sources, such as parents, friends, teachers, and so on. [thus], There are strong collective influences on social learning” (2010, p. 410). It behooves the society, then, to sanction certain media influenced behaviours, and to sanctify itself.

5. Evaluating impact of social media on family values

From theoretical approach of uses and gratification theory, users apply media to satisfy certain needs which are zeroed down to cognitive, affective, personal integration, social integration, and tension release needs of individuals. The above needs are ascertained needs long before the advent of social media. As presented earlier in this study, people use media to provide for their above mentioned needs which are, first and foremost, human needs. As human needs they were in existence long before the evolution of the media age. Thus, there were other ways people satisfied those needs before the media age. In those days, parents, siblings, relations helped others to satisfy those needs; and when satisfaction of such needs were beyond an immediate family, neighbours, or the community provided for what was lacking. Songs, folklores, paradoxes, idioms, wise-sayings and face to face interactions were used to satisfy such human needs. Satisfying such needs made families and communities pivotal points of human societies as people nurtured more unity amongst themselves. In her work, Chambers sees effects of social media usage to build intimacies outside of traditionally recognized settings of intimacies as a “process of detraditionalization [which] paves the way for a more fluid and transient notion of intimate connections, beyond the family to incorporate friendship and to acknowledge the social significance of looser, more flexible ties” (Chambers, 2013, p. 162).

It is germane to point out here, though, that the evolution of the media cum social media was aimed at cementing these converging points traditional human societies have built overtime like: unity, togetherness, communion, and their likes. With usage of social media, however, users began building intimacies and friendships outside of family circles. With the length of time people spent on social media, virtual families or communities loomed larger than regular ones. Family values, therefore, became immediate sufferers of social media users. In extreme scenarios family times and activities became hijacked by social media usage or in moderate situations, family times and activities were punctuated with social media usage.

The theoretical approach of SLT proffers an opening to address the excesses of the social media with its motivational element. Since behaviours learnt from the society or from social media could be subject to modification by motivation or demotivation, it becomes imperative on the society cum family to demotivate such behaviours that cut against family values.

6. Conclusion

Social media belong to this contemporary age. Social media have as many users as they have critics. Though their negative effects outweigh their positive effects, they are still used by people. Their excesses as negative as they are, are left to the human society to control. Their adverse effects on family values should be left unchecked.

If media use is to satisfy certain human needs, satisfaction of such needs should not negate primary human foundations like the family or its values. If media cum social media users are not enlightened users, then there is an obvious need for users to be informed before using social media. If social media are to serve media needs of users, then they should be used to support human family especially its values.

Social media should serve media needs of humans, and as such, are not to be treated as if they are above humans. Therefore, human societies should have norms that guide social media use in families in ways that are more positive than negative. In other words, human society should be judge over social media usage; and as such, be able to demotivate negative effects coming from them. Over and above all, media education is imperative.

7. Recommendations

The following are recommendations made by this study:

1. Families should regain their special place as the bedrock of socialization by adapting social media as a tool for family purposes – not just for use of individuals in family. Where parents share media platform together with their adult children, the family has more chances of putting some control on its media usage.
2. A pervasive media cum social media education must be undertaken by families. This is of paramount importance to enable families understand the social media, know how they work, and know how they can use them to satisfy their needs.
3. Communication experts should work out “best user” manual to enable some family friendly social media usage. Knowing that social media users are not passive audience, it becomes imperative to modify how social media operate. More and more family friendly social media software should be manufactured to engender family unity.
4. Experts and talented individuals should create audiovisual clips and messages that promote family values. This way the mechanism of social media will be used to promote these all-important family values.
5. Self-discipline which is a necessary accompaniment in life’s journey should be a cardinal virtue for all users of social media.

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