

Social Media Networking and Its Influence on Interpersonal Face To Face Oral Communication at Family Level: A Qualitative Study of Selected Families in Eldoret Town; Kenya

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Abstract: This study is a qualitative survey on the influence of social media networking on the most basic and important level of communication which is interpersonal face-to-face communication. This type of communication is the intimacy communication which is vital for the wellbeing of family which is a crucial human institution. This threatened form of communication is key in conflicts management and reconciliation. Family as an institution determines the success or failure of other institutions in the human society and interpersonal communication is key to this. The main purpose of this study was to investigate if the current influx of social media has sacrificed or rather compromised interpersonal communication at face-to-face level and what recommendations could be made to mitigate on it. The following theories were analyzed to check on their relevance in this context; Face-Negotiation Theory, Social Exchange Theory Social Penetration Theory and Uses and gratification theory. It is important to note that theories influence the way people think, interpret their world, and the actions they take. We develop theories about our environment to help organize and interpret our experiences. The research design that was used to provide a framework for this study was qualitative survey. Convenience non-probability sampling technique was use to have families that were engaged in interviews and focused group discussions. The results revealed that social networking engagement has negatively influenced the family dyadic communication hence affecting badly the family interrelationship.

Keywords: Social media, Interpersonal relationships, Face to face communication, Interpersonal communication, Qualitative research, Face negotiation, Uses and gratification theory, Social exchange theory and Social penetration theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is core in the development of meaningful interpersonal relationships and therefore any negative influence on one affects the other. Hanson (2008) defined interpersonal communication as one on one communication. It is the intentional or accidental transmission of information through verbal or non-verbal message systems to another human being. Interpersonal communication provides many opportunities for feedback through nodding, raising eyebrows, touch or simple answers. The importance of face-to-face and verbal interpersonal communication is numerous. Due to its nature of close proximity, feedback is immediate and the use of non-verbal communication cues is very effective. This idea is supported by Dominick (2011) who mentioned that feedback is another difference that exists between interpersonal and mass communication in that the flow in mass communication is typically one-way, and feedback, in many instances is more difficult than in the interpersonal setting. Social media according to

Dominick (ipid) are online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration and linkage. These include linkages such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Blogs. In simple way social media can be understood as online tools and services which allow an exchange of ideas, information, videos, pictures, and graphic just about anything you can name.

It is also good to observe here that social media has enhanced feedback but not as in the use non-verbal communication cues which is a very important compliment. Interpersonal communication on face to face setting is very emotional and essential particularly during counseling, giving an advice to a close person, in self disclosure, expressing love and teaching. Social media has changed the way people interact. In many ways, social media has led to positive changes in the way people communicate and share information. However, it has a dark side as well. Social networking can sometimes result in negative outcomes, some with long-term consequences (Frazier& Karen, 2010).According to Cornblatt, Johannah (2009) Social-networking sites like Facebook and MySpace may provide people with a false sense of connection that ultimately increases loneliness in people who feel alone. These sites should serve as a supplement, but not replacement for, face-to-face interaction. For people who feel satisfied and loved in their day-to-day life, social media can be a reassuring extension. For those who are already lonely, Facebook status updates are just a reminder of how much better everyone else is at making friends and having fun.

Beth (2011) outlined the following as unhealthy signs of addiction of social media use that the parents should be aware of:

- **Focusing on problems** – easily distracted and loss of ability to concentrate.
- **Lack of concern about one-on-one relationships** – prioritizing social networking over face to face family and friend relationships.
- **Lessening communication skills** – talking less, difficulty articulating thoughts into words, inattentive when others are speaking.
- **Unconcerned about obligations in the “real” world** – more interested in checking status updates and communicating on the internet than participating in activities off of the computer.
- **Withdrawal symptoms (agitation, fidgeting, aggressiveness, etc)** when unable to participate in social networking for a period of time.

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Social media is here with us and here to stay with tremendous benefits and dangers that need caution. Being a new phenomenon, negative effects cannot be ignored. Although social media may have many positive advantages, the negative effects of social networking outweigh the positive (Simonsen, 2013). Also Kelly, (2011) observed that there has been a dramatic increase in the use of technology in the average American home, making researchers believe that we are in a new technological revolution. This revolution has brought about many useful tools and devices that allow people to access nearly anything they desire within a few simple clicks. Langat (2015) in his studies on the influence of social media on study habits of undergraduate students in Kenyan universities found out that addiction of social media has a negative effects on study habits leading to poor academic performance among students. Other studies have been done on the impact of social media on moral habits and found to be negative and socially harmful among others.

In addition to this, Mitchell (2000) explained that the ease and accessibility of these new technologies makes it extremely possible to become dependent or even addicted to them. Internet dependency is the degree to which an individual uses the Internet and the degree to which a user can develop a dependent relationship consistent with “compulsive overuse of the Internet that causes irritable or moody behavior when deprived of it” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 632).

As the Internet is becoming more interwoven into daily life, the use of the Internet and/or social media becomes a higher priority. Young (1999) explained that the “addictive use of the Internet is a new phenomenon which many practitioners are unaware of and subsequently unprepared to treat” (p. 19).With the growing nature of the Internet and media, the idea of dependent relationships is still being explored. This study therefore explored on the influence of social media on the area of face to face interactive form of interpersonal communication which is core in the formation and development of interpersonal relationships.

1.2 Justification/Significance of this study:

Various studies on the effects of social media on students have concentrated mainly on academic performance (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Oluwatoyin 2011; and Ogedebe, Emmanuel, & Musa, 2012).Others on moral and study habits of the

students such as (Langat 2015). This research shifts its attention away from this and rather focuses on how social media influences on face to face interpersonal communication.

Moreover, this social media study was very necessary because of the fact that several complains have been raised by parents, administrators, employers, teachers and church leaders among others on the abuse of the social media in one way or another. All these groups normally talk of social media disruption or interference on serious face to face dialogue, lectures and discussions. This study therefore has shade light on this. It is true from the findings of this study that social media misuse has interfered with the very important part of face to face interpersonal communication. People who doubted the negative influence of this media on interpersonal communication which is core in building interpersonal relationship can attest to this. The recommendations made by this study are believed to help people in controlling excessive use of social media during interactions that require face to face communication.

1.3 Theoretical Framework:

This study has been informed greatly by four theories of media and communication namely: face -negotiation theory, social exchange theory, social penetration theory and uses and gratification theory.

1.4 Face-Negotiation Theory:

This Theory is concerned with how people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures negotiate face to face in conflict situations. It has to do with the use of face to face interpersonal communication to resolve conflicts. This theory is based on face management, which describes how people from different cultures manage conflict negotiation in order to maintain face. Self-face and other-face concerns explain the conflict negotiation between people from various cultures. In relations to social media this benefit is limited. This theory therefore encourages the use of face to face interpersonal communication mode particularly when resolving conflicts in order to develop good interpersonal relationships in our families and our places of work. If face-to-face communication is key to negotiation and conflicts resolution, therefore social networking which has been found to be a great threat to this form of communication should be controlled.

1.5 Social Exchange Theory:

This theoretical position argues that the major force in interpersonal relationships is the satisfaction of both people's self-interest. Theorists in Social Exchange posit that self-interest is not necessarily a bad thing and that it can actually enhance relationships. The Social Exchange approach views interpersonal exchange posit that self-interest is not necessarily a bad thing and that it can actually enhance relationships. The Social Exchange approach views interpersonal exchanges as analogous to economic exchanges where people are satisfied when they receive a fair return on their expenditures. This theory on the other hand supports the function of social media in interpersonal communication no matter the position of communication be it favorable or unfavorable. The main purpose of communication here is to provide satisfaction. This therefore open alternative ways of communication that can provide more satisfaction than social media in some settings or context like during guidance and counselling, consoling a bereaved person or correcting a family member.

1.6 Social Penetration Theory:

This theory maintains that interpersonal relationships evolve in some gradual and predictable fashion. In connection to this emerging and predictable interpersonal relationship, interpersonal communication is the baseline. Penetration theorists believe that self-disclosure is the primary way that superficial relationships progress to intimate relationships. Although self-disclosure can lead to more intimate relationships, it can also leave one or more persons vulnerable. The ultimate creation of intimate relationship is self-disclosure which can take place more satisfactorily through face to face interpersonal communication. Self disclosure cannot take place fully through social media. This theory therefore provides relevance of face to face communication without mediation. It is important to note that in self disclosure, face to face interaction is important because each member is greatly influenced by non-verbal communication cues.

1.7 Uses and Gratifications Theory:

Uses and Gratifications theorists explain why people choose and use certain media forms. The theory emphasizes a limited effect position; that is, the media have a limited effect on their audiences because audiences are able to exercise control over their media. Uses and Gratifications Theory attempts to answer the following questions: What do people do with the media? Nevertheless, risks lie in communication with dangerous strangers, lack of face-to-face interaction, and the weak

ning of family ties. Much research remains to be done in this field before any conclusive assumptions can be made. In fact according to Fabos et al (2012) uses gratification model was proposed to content the notion of a passive media audience. They purport that researchers usually find it convenient when collecting data through in-depth interviews to supplement survey questionnaires. Davenport et al (2014) observed that normally users actively seek out media that meet their needs for knowledge for knowledge, social interaction, and diversion. Based on this nature of media use and gratification, social media therefore unless checked by the users is likely to provide satisfaction with far away individuals at the expense of those who deserve our time for face to face communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature in this case was limited by little relevant studies in Kenya and most of the other countries in Africa. This limitation however has been addressed through extensive primary sources. Review of the literature in social media covered their importance in the present world, their negative influence on the most important areas of human life such as in health, education and moral behaviour.

2.1 What is Social Media?

Right from the background of this study, I have given different definitions of social media. Within this section of literature review, I can further review the definition beginning with the definition from the Central Office of Information (www.coi.gov.uk). Which said the following in its 2009 publication “Engaging through Social Media”

Social media is a term used to refer to online technologies and practices that are used to share opinions and information, promote discussion and build relationships. To me this definition is limited to the positive function of social media. Could be it was the initial intentional definition.

Social media services and tools involve a combination of technology, telecommunications and some kind of social interaction. They can use a variety of different formats, for example text, pictures, video and audio. This second definition to me is more practical.

2.2 Importance of social media:

Basically social the importance of social media over other mainstream traditional forms of media for example according to (Nielsen 2011) Social media is different to traditional forms of communication such as through newspapers, television, and film.

Cheap – anyone can easily access to the internet (for example through public libraries) and in the cell-phones.

Accessible – the tools are easy to use

Enabling – allows almost anyone to do things that previously were only the preserve of well-resourced organisations

The use of the word “Social” implies a conversation. Social media is definitely not about one-way communication to a large audience from big organisations social are currently the most popular online genre of all accounting for about a quarter of leisure time spent online in the U.S.

Social media being the most popular in leisure time, control measures therefore are critical requirements to protect users from getting addicted and hence abusing it. Social media in Universities has also proved to be the most efficient means of communication for students learning activities such as lecture alerts, study groups alerts and warning incase of any impending dangers in the campus. These were the findings on the study of the influence of social media on study habits among undergraduate students in the universities by (Langat, 2014).

Fabos et al (2012) categorically mentioned that social media such as Face book, Twitter, and Foursquire, provide a wealth of data for advertising. These sites and apps create an unprecedented public display of likes and dislikes, location and other personal information. This is one of the reasons to why knowledge of ethical and responsible use of social media is necessary to safeguard consumers from dangerous advertising that may find social media as a loose end for their illicit businesses. This is due to the fact that social media has eroded the ethical culture and the power of conventional media.

Importance of social media can be summarized according to Davenport (2014) as a dimension of audience power in the new world to contribute content of their own by creating it themselves. They also observed that social networking sites

are becoming major tools for PR research data gathering as vehicles for getting a message out. The social media is used to provide news advertising, public relations, entertainment and in the political movements. Social media emerged as a term frequently used to describe different types of electronic communication platforms. The availability of high speed internet broadband connection with massive use of desktop computers, laptops, e-readers, tablets and smart phones enable millions of undergraduates to actively engage in social networking, text messaging, blogging, content sharing, online learning and much more. Research also has provided evidence that young people use online social networking to maintain already existing friendships and build communities. Allen et al (2010) also added that social networking websites gives adolescents a new outlet for creating long distance relationships which is becoming detrimental to the development of young people's face- to-face social skills. Many researchers and individuals are thankful for these innovations, suggesting they may promote relationship building and maintenance and allow individuals to communicate while standing at opposite ends of the world (Kavanaugh, Carroll, Rosson, Zin, & Reese 2005). New technologies also make many of our interactions easier and faster, and enable people with social anxiety to communicate with others in a more comfortable social environment.

2.3 Health hazards of social media:

As technological communication becomes progressively diffused into our culture, however, it is apparent that just as many negative as positive outcomes are emerging. According to an article written in 2005, employers are complaining about the lack of interpersonal communication skills their job applicants have, and communications skills have consequently been pushed to the top of the list of qualities required of employees (McKay, 2005). Neuroscience research has begun to examine how technological communication is altering our brains. These studies have found that the brains of individuals who spend a lot of time on the Internet resemble those of drug addicts in significant ways. Every time an individual responds to the ping of an instant message or text message, a small amount of dopamine is secreted in the brain as a reward, similar to being under the influence of drugs (Dokoupil, 2012). Consequently, humans are becoming addicted to these rewarding pings, just as with addicting drugs. As we spend more time on the Internet our socialization with others face-to-face is clearly decreasing as well. A study conducted in 2010 showed that the more time members of our society spend using the computer, the less time they spend in person with family and friends (Nie & Erbring, 2010). Other research suggests that 39% of Americans spend more time socializing online than face-to-face (Thompson, 2012). The American Psychiatric Association has shown clear concern with our cultural tendency to spend copious hours on the Internet.

3. NEGATIVE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA/NETWORKING

In this section I would like to summarize the negative social effects of social media just as a guide for further reading by my audience. We also find that about two-thirds of the students reported using electronic media while in class, studying, or doing homework (Jacobsen, & Forste, 2011). This multitasking increases distraction, something prior to this research has shown to be detrimental to student performance. As to the relationship between social media and grades, a study released by Ohio State University reveals that college students who utilize Facebook spend less time on studying and have lower grades than students who do not use the popular social networking sites (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Langat (2015) in his study on the influence of social media networking on the study habits of undergraduate students in Universities in Kenya found out that it affects them negatively leading to poor performance in examinations. Another related study was done by Denny Carter (2013) whereby in his study on preventive medicine shows a link between social media use and poor academic performance due to poor time management. Bushman and Huesmann (2006) in their study found out that social networking promotes violent spirit among the youths and also expose them on Cyber-bullying. These studies touches only on study habits and cyber bullying, there remain a wider area to be studied on the other negative effects of social networking.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design can be explained as a systematic plan to study a scientific problem. It is a roadmap that guides research process. It can also be defined as an overall research strategy that a researcher chooses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way thereby ensuring that you effectively address the problem (De vaus, 2001). This study is a descriptive survey. Descriptive survey simply surveys phenomena and explained it the way it is without interfering with its present position. Mugenda (2008) said that descriptive design studies are conducted in communities to establish the extent of a range of various social issues.

4.1 The research approach:

According to Cresswell (2009), there are three approaches to research namely qualitative approach, quantitative and mixed method approach. This study took qualitative approach. Qualitative research is defined by Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) as an approach to inquiry that emphasizes a naturalistic search for reality in meaning, multiplicity of interpretations, particularity, details and flexibility in studying a phenomenon or the aspect(s) of it that a researcher chooses to focus on a given time. As Hammersley et al.(2001) would argue that qualitative research is concern about life as it is lived ,things, as they happened, situation as they are constructed in the day to day moment.Thus,in qualitative research, we endeavor to seek lived experiences in real situations. This study used face to face interviews and focused group discussions to obtain information from 15 married women,15 married men ,15 female youths and 15 male youths who have completed form four and had their personal smart phones. Some Participants were purposively sampled while others were opportunistically approached and engaged into a deep discussion in a natural and friendly setting.

4.2 Summary of the findings:**4.2.1 Importance of social media:**

All the respondents acknowledged that social media is a very good means of communication because particularly to the distance friends and relatives. They mentioned that it is relatively cheap compared to making calls or using short message system. They also mentioned that it is amusing and educative particularly when they get moral stories, motivational stories and jokes.

On the other hand respondents also mentioned that social media has the following shortcomings:

4.2.2 Breakdown of face to face oral communication:

The parents strongly and emotively expressed their worries concerning the fact that their teenagers especially those who have cleared secondary schools and those in colleges are no longer interested in listening to them especially when it comes to serious family conversations in the family. Parents also have become victims of the same whereby social networking takes much of their family closer social time. They mention that they are physically closer but socially especially in oral communication they are very much at a distance

...my husband normally delays in the sitting room busy chatting while I am lonely in bed. What keeps me busy these days is that I also chat a lot with distant friends...

Based on the above discussion response, it is possible to note that social networking has made members to ignore their interpersonal communication and slowly and steadily it is leading to a breakdown in interpersonal relationships.

5. ADDICTIVE

...This thing (social networking) has become strongly part of our lives. That we don't know what to do to get out of it...

Five married men in a focused group discussion all agreed that they are helpless captives as shown in the above comment. This therefore shows that they are addicted...I used to quarrel my husband but these days I just see him....even me, Likewise to me, in our family our children chat with their friends...we do ours...According to the above results of a focused group from five married ladies they have reached at a state of simply accepting the situation and have accommodated. This is a terrible state when it comes to communication.

6. POOR LISTENING

Listening is key to effective communication. Parents in various face to face interviews expressed that in most cases, when they are talking to their children, they are busy chatting. This has contributed to failure to take instructions hence poor response to duties assigned....my son is always on phone when I am talking to him...I am afraid that whenever I send him to to something..two things happens. He can go and come back to confirm and bring to me something different...

Most of the parents in focused group discussions agreed strongly with the above scenario. One of parents asserted laughingly that he sent his son to the shop two weeks ago to bring sugar and the son went to the shop chatting and after thirty minutes he had to come back to confirm what the father wanted. Majority of the youths also confirmed that in most cases parents complain that they are not listening to them. This situation according to them has extended to school particularly to those who are in colleges. They mentioned that...we are always tempted to chat when teaching is going on...and normally the lecturers complained about it...

7. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

According to social exchange theory the major force in interpersonal relationships is the satisfaction of both people's self-interest. Theorists in Social Exchange posit that self-interest is not necessarily a bad thing and that it can actually enhance relationships however if self-interest supersedes the family social interest, the likelihood is breakdown in communication leading in most cases to break down in the interpersonal relationships. Face-to-face communication enhances interpersonal relationships due to use of non-verbal communication cues and immediate feedback. On the other hand, Social Penetration Theory maintains that interpersonal relationships evolve in some gradual and predictable fashion. Penetration theorists believe that self-disclosure is the primary way that superficial relationships progress to intimate relationships. Taking note of self disclosure which takes place more effectively through dyadic face-to-face communication at intimacy level, any media that sacrifices this form of communication is dangerous unless it is controlled. Uses and Gratifications theorists explain why people choose and use certain media forms. The theory emphasizes a limited effect position; that is, the media have a limited effect on their audiences because audiences are able to exercise control over their media. This idea of media having little effect on the audience is not the same position held according to the findings of this study. The findings of this study show that social media networking is strongly addictive rendering its audience captives. Finally is the discussion of the findings based on Face-Negotiation Theory. This Theory is concerned with how people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures negotiate face to face in conflict situations. It has to do with the use of face to face interpersonal communication to resolve conflicts. This study therefore enhances the position held by the proponents of this theory. Social networking according to the findings of this study is during family interpersonal communication is threatened leading to poor interpersonal relationships giving way to misunderstanding and conflicts. In conclusion the findings of this study shows that social networking is cost effective, faster and bridge distance by bringing people in diverse parts of the world closer to each other. The negative influence however in our context outweighs its strengths. These include being addictive, making one be too open to the world due to poor self disclosure communication skills, poor listening and break down of interpersonal communication opening ways to poor interpersonal relationships and inability to resolve conflicts.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

First there should be family discipline that when interpersonal face- to-face communication is taking place everybody should listen effectively and contribute accordingly. During this period of time phones should either be switched off or put in silent mode.

Secondly is self-control: having known the dangers of uncontrolled networking, everybody should exercise self-management before getting into addiction of social media.

Guidance and counseling session should always be done in various institutions, such as in churches, schools, to assist people from becoming social victims of social networking which can lead to media cyber bullying and cheating or rather creation of false relationships.

Issues of social networking/media should be integrated into education curriculum at all levels so that awareness is created at all levels. Knowing the dangers as early as possible through schooling will greatly help.

8.1 Recommendations for further study:

The study on social media/networking is current and very rich and therefore other related areas for study include:

Influence of social networking on organizational ethics and professionalism Effects of social networking/media on time management and job efficiency.

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