

A DISCOURSE ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA (SM) ON AFRICAN'S INDIGENOUS VALUES AND MORALITY

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Abstract

The paper discussed moral and ethical consequences of the increasing utilization of social media platforms in Africa. Relying on secondary sources of information (books, newspapers, magazines, and journals) and (the internet/social media), the paper observed that many people in Africa are growing more sophisticated in the use of Social Media (SM) platforms. The application of the platform has transformed the capacity of Africans in their private and public lives through enhanced channels of communication. However, the application poses serious challenge to public morality in Africa. The SM platforms are replete with transmitting immorality and also provide the widest medium for anyone to communicate same across the world. The adaptation and application of social media has therefore adversely affected cherished Africans' values. The hardest part is coming to terms with the over indulgence of African youths. The paper recommends that its application should be censored and subjected to cultural suitability test. This is the only way to preserve cherished African's traditional core moral values which essence should be taught to youthful users at their early stages in life.

Keywords: Cultural suitability, Core values, Ethics, Morality, Social media

DISCOURS SUR LES IMPLICATIONS DES APPLICATIONS DES MÉDIAS SOCIAUX (SM) SUR LES VALEURS AUTOCHTONES ET LA MORALITÉ DE L'AFRIQUE

Abstrait

Le document discutait des conséquences morales et éthiques de l'utilisation croissante des plateformes de médias sociaux en Afrique. S'appuyant sur des sources d'informations secondaires (livres, journaux, magazines et revues) et (Internet / médias sociaux), le journal observe que de nombreuses personnes en Afrique utilisent de plus en plus les plateformes de médias sociaux (MS). L'application de la plate-forme a transformé la capacité des Africains dans leur vie privée et publique grâce à des canaux de communication améliorés. Cependant,

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l'application pose un sérieux défi à la moralité publique en Afrique. Les plates-formes SM regorgent d'immoralité de transmission et fournissent également le support le plus large permettant à quiconque de communiquer de la même manière dans le monde entier. L'adaptation et l'application des médias sociaux ont donc porté atteinte aux valeurs des Africains chers. Le plus difficile est de faire face à la trop grande indulgence des jeunes africains. Le document recommande que son application soit censurée et soumise à un test d'aptitude culturelle. C'est le seul moyen de préserver les valeurs morales fondamentales traditionnelles de l'Africain chéri, dont il faut enseigner l'essence aux jeunes utilisateurs dès le début de leur vie.

Mots-clés: Adéquation culturelle, Valeurs fondamentales, Éthique, Moralité, Médias sociaux

Introduction

From historical narratives, man invented tools, which helped him to cope with problems of advancing life. For better or for worse, the developments have led to greater inventions which have aided socio-cultural enhancement especially in communication. The emergence of the social media (SM) is an evolution in the way people communicate and its applicability has greatly impacted the ways information are accessed and used around the world today. People now have available to them different types of social media tools, which could be accessed and used at the convenience of their homes and/or offices to get out messages and mobilize to perform several other activities to enhance their daily living. The social media have become the world's widest and fastest, channels of communication. It has thereby become the harbinger of information and compendium of cultures and values, irrespective of time and place.

Rapid technological changes are the hallmarks of the globalized world. Several natural and man-made challenges have been conquered with technology on the dual basis of an overwhelming efficiency and an increasing standard of living. The positive progress in science and technology such as the discoveries in medicine have ensured man's health and long-life aided by computers and robots. The movements between thousand miles are reduced by fast flying jets. There is also the industrial impact: technology makes for faster production and distribution of goods and services.

From the governance dimension, new technological developments that combine computer and telecommunication have resulted in transformation especially as it relates to vast relationships with stake holders (employees, citizens and private individuals) who can now receive direct services from government without having face to face interaction or suffer bureaucratic procedures (Rocheleu, 2006). Public services such as bill payment, information on government's services, application forms, identity evidence and government documents are all provided through the help of information and communication technology (ICT). E-government (a new form of government built around ICTs is now generally accepted as a major innovation in the desire to achieve the modernization of public administration (Bekkers & Homburg, 2005).

In the same vein, the social media have challenged the traditional meaning of journalism. Many media houses are now forced to adopt its tools or they rather stay backward (Didiugwu, Ezugwu, & Ekwe, 2015; Azimi, 2016). The social media brought many

opportunities to journalism. Its interactive features give the audience the opportunity to comment, give feedback or even vote issues. This development has enabled journalists to move closer to engaging with their audience. The applications of SM have certainly altered the way journalists work in terms of news gathering and dissemination (Espisu & Kariithi; 2007 and Ismail; 2012).

Generally, the SM platforms have helped to fast track information gathering and dissemination across the globe. Many people in Africa are now growing more sophisticated in the use of the SM platforms. For example, in 2011 Egyptians used *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube* as means to communicate and organized demonstrations and rallies to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak. The SM platforms have promoted the art of life, especially in entertainment and amorous activities (in music, style, art, and drama). The applications of the SM have united old friends; and have helped to build relationships. For instance, *YouTube* gives anyone with a camera the power to share their content, *WhatsApp* allows for chatting, sending personal pictures and songs as well as texting videos and calls at a much reduced rates irrespective of distance and circumstances. The *Facebook* offers friends and families, who may have been out of contact for decades the opportunity to reunite. It is a rich platform for education and enlightenment of the goings-on around the world. Similarly, the Blackberry device provides a special platform not only for chatting but for ping and other voice notes. Better still, the Instagram like the Twitter, visualizes chatting, encourages video chatting especially between friends and family members, allow users easy access to celebrities' life styles, and to know the latest trends around the world (Espisu & Kariithi; 2007 & Ismail; 2012). It follows that the social media have immense sociological values.

Technological changes may be a panacea to human quest for improved life styles, but they could also become threat. As noted by Diamond, (2005, p.505) many of man current problems are "unintended negative consequences of our existing technology". New technology could be destructive of the free development of human needs and faculties (Marcuse 1964, p. 229). New technologies, including social media, due to their deficiency in coping with the obnoxious latent consequences, always bring new problems. The capacity of the social media to create a universal language and institute a universal culture is a huge challenge to valued cultural specifics in several parts of the world especially Africa, where there is now serious concerns about issues of morality and the necessity to whittle down its application and access.

The aim of this paper is to assess the social media and evaluate the context of its ethics and moral standard. Such evaluation would enable us to fathom the sociological and philosophical paradigms for the adaptation and application of the social media in Africa. There is the need to put into perspective those sociological (social impact) and philosophical issues (ethical consideration) arising from the application of the social media. In the process, it is intended that the concept of morality and the province of morality should be defined. In the end and with suitable examples, we hope to indicate how the application of social media is divested of moral values and replete with, social, and moral infamies, which themselves are a pedestal for social disintegration. The question that arises is whether there are ethical and moral implications of the applications of the social media in Africa. The attempt to address this question is the imperative of this discourse.

Conceptualizing social media(SM) morality and ethics

The SM are interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitates the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression through virtual

communities and networks (Kietzmann, Hermkiens, Maccarthy & Silvestre, 2011). The SM platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, BlackBerry Messenger, and many others used to communicate and share information (Aun, 2013). It encompasses Web-based networks and tools that allow users to create and share information. They are distinct from traditional media such as newspaper, magazine, television, radio, and film as they are comparatively inexpensive and accessible to enable anyone to publish or access information. The SM has been defined as computer-mediated technologies that allow the creating and sharing of information, ideas, career interest, and other forms of expression via visual communities and networks (Merriam-Webster, 2016). It encapsulates communication in contemporary society involving all computers propelled electronic communication (such as web sites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create on-line communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other contents.

Morality is the foundation for the rightness or wrongness of action. Morality implies the sum total of the norms, mores and laws that form a people's foundation for action. Morality portends values; and a value is an operative habit that is good. Good habits are formed from cherished interior dispositions not mere instincts. Values reflect inclinations and dispositions, "The accessory quality that enables man to use his potencies or faculties correctly, with ease, promptness and pleasure" (Garrigou-Lagrange, 1965, p. xi). Public morality regulates the behaviour and values of individuals and communities to achieve social order, cohesion and solidarity. Public morality defines law, mores, norms and other aspects of community arrangements. They are public ethos which provides the cement of any human society. The law, especially the criminal law, regards it as a primary function to maintain public morality (Peschke, 2004). Hence, one is expected to act according to accepted norms and values of a society or social system; simply living a virtuous life. Morality tailors human activity towards virtue and good life. To say moral principles are universal is to agree that, though they allow some exceptions, the world has a moral consciousness.

Ethics are values, rules, standards, or principles that should guide our decisions about what ought to be done (Singer, 1994, p. 10). The basis of ethics is to be found in our emotions or passions (Singer, 1994). Ethical realism asserted that objective ethical facts exist independently of anyone or society. It holds that "ethical truths are true whether or not anyone says/thinks they are true". What is right is absolutely indisputable and independent of all factors such as period and situation and place, no exception. A single ethical system might provide some guidelines for ordering principles and priorities. Ethical absolutism: the view that there is a single moral standard which should be applicable to all men, at all times, and in all circumstance is unacceptable. Thus the question and dilemma remains: Shall we encourage ethical pluralism, ÷ the coexistence of several value systems (Solomon & Greener, 1999)?

It is the total set of moral, ethical, customs, and legal-human rights which define and describe, promote and defend a given society's or community's common, shared values, vision and public ethos geared towards achieving a desired civilization.

Methodology

The method adopted for this discourse is simply critical analyticity. Philosophizing is analytic when it follows a procedural approach that is "defined by a characteristic procedural focus...understood as prioritizing some objects of analysis over others and, in so doing, of picking out certain kinds of question as particularly valuable" (Niekerk 2015, p.517).

Analytic philosophy is a style of doing philosophy and not a philosophical program or a set of substantive views (Brogaard & Leiter (2015). It meaningfully distinguishes a specific

style of doing philosophy that consists in some distinctive characteristics. For instance, it tests propositional claims in ordinary language, and pursues parsimonious explanations. The analytic tradition is a procedural focus that prioritizes some objects over others. It separates the constituent elements of phenomena into its various atomic components for holistic and comprehensive understanding. It is characterized by argumentative clarity and precision following the method of formal logic.

Our analyticity posture is qualitative in that we merely relied on explanations, reviews, evaluations and several presuppositions contained in the extant literature to assess the conception and application of the social media. References were also made to live examples day-to-day uses of social media platforms. The work relied on up-to-date and reliable secondary sources of information: printed (books, newspapers, magazines, and journals) and soft (the internet/social media).

Theoretical Framework

Consequentialist or utilitarian theory will guide the analysis in this work. The theory emphasizes that actions are either right or wrong depending on their consequences. The rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by whether it produces or impedes the purpose of human action. Bentham (1789) and Mill (1861) are classical advocates of this theory; it tends to evaluate conduct (right or wrong) in terms of the goods actually produced, rather than the motives of the agent. Motives are not intrinsically bad or good, wrong or right (Jones, 1969). The theory places the locus of right and wrong solely on the end result or consequences. It is expected that social conditions should improve in response to the ideas and/or technology applied; that, the social condition does not improve, perhaps because the dosage was not enough to counter and ameliorate the nasty issues or elements in the social system. While the social condition degenerates; or, finally, the ideas applied become counter-productive, the social condition dramatically worsens, becomes irreversible and the society breaks down into chaos, anarchy, or some other warring conditions expressive of disorder; because of application of the wrong ideas and technology. It could simply be a misapplication or misunderstanding and miscomprehension of the direction or essence of the universe; it could simply be act of evil or wickedness or the fakeness of some ideas.

From the angle of the utilitarian framework it can be said that although the intention of the social media platforms appears to be impeccable but their applications have corresponding perversion. This brings to focus the implications of its inventing and spread. The values of the SM platforms are embedded in their desirable usages. Even if the SM platforms are not evil in themselves, it is necessary to take into account the probable harm that results from using them and the justice of accepting those harms. It is of utmost importance in assessing harms caused by the adaptation and applications of the SM and the justice of accepting them to think about cherished African cultural values and morality that are likely to be victims. An idea or technology is disruptive if it disconnects some set of practices, technologies or rules, from their moral foundation as appropriate within a specific cultural context and thereby undermines the core assumptions and beliefs of institutions and the society at large. The Social media is an art. The morality of an art is culture dependent. Culture determines moral standards. Accordingly, developments in science and technology such as the SM would have social, economic, ethical and moral implications. The SM with all its attendant values, tended to produce a world culture, thus posing serious challenges to cultural specifics.

By consequentialist account, social media cannot stand. All the negative moral consequences of the applications of the social media discredit its discovery. There abounds so

much in its latent functions, to indicate its absurdity. The state of affairs in a society which experiences the acme of embracement of wrong ideas, values, or ill-application of even good ideas, values/beliefs and other aspects of enculturation is usually precarious. The applications of the SM have very high corruptive capacities.

The Social media and African's indigenous values and morality

Africans are increasingly taking advantage of social media to press out their perceptions, anger and dreams. About 39% of Nigerian depends on the SM for daily news. However, several old and cherished African cultural values have been affected or lost to the applications of the SM platforms. Notably, African homes used to be safe zones where visiting friends and family members receive hugs and share family stories; food, tea, coffee and drinks are shared with visitors. The advent of the SM has changed all that. Visitations by family and friends have been replaced by text messages, chat, *gif* or *emojis*. Many people now live in isolation and loneliness because text messages cannot be equated with visitation to loved ones.

Child-upbringing and control have eluded the world, particularly the African world which deeply values moral behaviour. Contemporary milieu, with the social media as catalyst, represents the acme of moral degeneracy. Corruption, injustices, immoralities are advertised to the parent and child alike, to the lay and pious altogether via the SM platforms. African values forbid children and young adults to discuss sex-related topics much less practice such. Today, the selfie which allows for personal adverts replete with different postures of nudity are transmitted through the social media across the world. Next-to-nudity has become the ideal fashion.

The application of the SM allow people (both young and old) to engage in voice/video sexual interactions between partners even right in the presence of their spouses, siblings, wards, and parents or even in the work place or offices, churches and students' classrooms. Through the SM, children are now exposed to sales adverts on weapons, ammunitions, explosives and magazines without restrictions. They are also exposed to networks that show how bombs are made and guns modified.

Worst still, able youths waste away glued to cell phones and other electronic/communication media, platforms or device for chatting, twitting, pinging and so on. Pinging is often a prolonged conversation/dialogue between two intimate partners on any subject, but most often of erotic basis. Chatting downplays voice calls and texting and makes one's contact visible to the many unknown. Commitment to the applications causes distractions and addictiveness, especially on irrelevant or immoral discussions.

Irresponsible immoral disorder, depression and other social dislocations become inevitable in the 'contagious effect' of the use of social media platforms. Consequently, indecent exposure, violent attractions, rape, and perversion, pervade in our society today. The result is the increased violence in our streets, homes and communities; with all the attendant cost of maintaining peace and security by government. Some users have experienced threat of violence online and have feared these threats manifesting themselves offline.

The social media is indeed a way of internalizing foreign accretions universally with untold consequences for indigenous cultural values especially languages. African youths are utilizing newly invented universal language via the SM. To cut down on the time it takes to respond online several abbreviations have been introduced. This can result in the death of several indigenous languages. As the means of human communication language expresses man's thought, will, emotion, desires, intentions and purposes. It is, thus, a mark of rationality and consciousness. Language is relative: even though language is universal, it's is still

dependent on culture through which it gets its meanings and references (Wiredu, 1983). The association of the SM with a new language is therefore worrisome for Africans who have for so long battled with how to save their indigenous languages from possible extinction and replacement with foreign languages.

Besides the foregoing, there are other reasons why Africans need to be cautious in the use of the SM. Notably, SM have been very notorious in popularizing falsehood. The SM is associated with 'fake news'. It can be difficult to verify whether the information of the SM is true or not. Most of the SM platforms are quick channels for falsehood. And unfortunately many share news even when they are not sure. The SM allows many people to get information not meant for them; leading to untold malaises such as assault and kidnapping many of which have been recorded in Nigeria where many people have been lured to their death through the SM platforms. Rape gangs now use social media platforms to lure the unsuspecting women to be gang raped and robbed.

The impact of the social media in the recent US presidential elections is instructive: President Trump embraced the SM platforms (particularly the Facebook and Twitter) to disseminate falsehood based on emotional appeals to millions around his country and beyond while followers advertised fake stories about him. Americans and the world-over are now bewildered with the palpable social-political implications of their suasion, the (mis)use of freedom. If Americans who are highly educated can be so swayed and defrauded, then Africans and indeed the peoples in the Third World are defenseless. Through the employment of social media, privacy is plundered; characters decimated, and falsehood propagated; persons have been deceived. This condition needs to be evaluated with a conviction for its emendation.

Secret recording for evil purposes is commonplace using the SM platform. Technologically configured pictures/videos are manipulated and re-circulated. In fact, one's video/photo could, and often, gets viral and into wrong hands. Most often, this leads to cheap blackmailing plus other inestimable consequences. Countless families have been rendered unstable and sometimes dissolved. The age long conflict between the Fulani herders and Tiv farmers in Northern Nigeria is a major victim of the SM platforms. The crisis is being aggravated by irresponsible SM applications in Nigeria. Fake news and several configured pictures/videos on the conflict are manipulated and re-circulated on a daily basis. Admitted that these infamies are not only restricted to the SM but to all other computer based communication outfits, it is noteworthy that the trajectory is unimaginable; and the condition is exacerbated and worsened, with the SM. The social media has serious issue with trustworthiness and reliability of information.

Recommendations

Given the shortcomings of the SM platforms, there is the need to check against its excesses. In Africa, cultural and moral values are unique and constitute the ethical pathway. We cannot fold our arms and allow them to filter away and be replaced by immoral ways and practices that are introduced via social media in the name of human rights and freedom of speech. We should not allow wayward lifestyles via social media to override our culture and tradition. This requires that new ethical inputs are shaped and conceived in forms which are in harmony with Africans' indigenous knowledge base and internal natural logic. The maintenance of social order, peace and development in a society, is a function of the maintenance of balance in human moral\ethical system. Such includes the maintenance of institutions through ensuring adherence to rule systems, and maintenance of institutions through reproducing

existing norms and belief systems. Disruption could result if rewards and sanctions from some set of practices, technologies or rules disconnect them from their moral foundation as appropriate within a specific cultural context. New technology can be adopted, but for it to find a fertile and receptive ground in African society it must be in harmony with extant values and free from the specific corruptive Western cultural packaging. Though the creative spirit is in itself a universal phenomenon; for it to respond to challenge, it needs to be rooted in a familiar and indigenous value systems.

Consequently, the recommendation here is that the adaptation and applications of the SM platforms in Africa should be censored and subjected to cultural suitability test. This is the only way to preserve cherished Africans' indigenous core values/morality. African core values and morality should be taught to Africa's youthful users of the SM at some early stages in life. Such lesson may be introduced into schools' curriculum.

Many western European countries have already implemented laws that regulate the SM applications. Africans also need laws to regulate usage and deal with the trap and dilemma posed by the social media. President Museveni of Uganda with the collaboration of the Uganda's parliament recently passed a law to impose tax on people using the social media platforms. The law imposes a 200 shillings (\$0.05) daily levy on people using internet messaging platforms like *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, *Viber* and *Twitter*. Pushing for the passage of the law which is expected to come into effect in July, 2018, President Museveni argued that the SM encourages gossip (Byaruhanga, 2018). In Nigeria, the government has embarked on an aggressive campaign against fake news which has been recognized as having the potential to affect the credibility of elections and indeed, national unity. Nigeria government, need to do more. There is urgent need for laws to regulate the SM platforms.

Summary and Conclusions

Social media platforms are informative, educative and entertaining. They are also eminently corruptive. The adaptation and applications of the social media have adversely affected cherished Africans' traditional values. The applications have resulted in moral stagnation and a paralysis in the dynamic of African values and morality, to the usurpation and atrophy of African perceptions. The SM platforms are technological imperialism which is worse than colonialism itself. It is socially genocidal, and culturally annihilating. The Social media tends to create and institute a universal culture with untold challenges to cultural specifics in Africa. The application of the SM negates several aspects of our culture and identity. Its applications have led to the near total extinction of indigenous morality and ethics.

The contemporary milieu is worse for the role SM play on African youths' development. Unregulated applications of the SM platforms have resulted in the spread of immoral communication across the world and are now open to people of any age, including children. Pornography has become standard farce and has led to a loss of Africans' primary cultural values. Concerns about the evil consequences of social media reflect our fear about the dangers the platform poses for our future generation and humanity. Unfortunately, there is no age limit to sign up for social media in several countries in Africa, Nigeria inclusive.

The intent of developing the social media is no doubt lofty. Social media have enhanced the capacity of Africans (groups, government, and individual citizens) through access to convenient, cheap and fast channels of communication. It will therefore require strong political will to deal with the challenge of the negative consequences of the applications of the SM platforms on society. African leaders must rise up to the challenge and let the world know that African's cherished indigenous values can be protected. The Social

media platforms are products of a globalized world. There should be no room for complacency. Policy makers in Africa would do well to heed the warning and arguments of Diamond (2005) and his followers at least, as a blueprint for action.

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