Role of social media and technology in interpersonal communication.

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Abstract

Social media has impacted various facets of modern life and it has a profound influence in inter-personal communication. The present day is characterized by acute lack of time for individuals and families due to the need for individuals to be employed for meeting the needs of a satisfactory life style. Time has become the most precious resource, and people are finding means of saving time because of their fast paced life style. People need interaction for fulfilling their social needs and social media has become a preferred medium for communication with the proliferation of digital and mobile technologies. Digitalization has reduced the face to face interaction of human beings whether it is for marketing or promoting a product or a personal communication. The mobile phone has created a social situation whereby people are getting used to avoidance of person to person communication by switching over to mobile. The present day life styles and lack of time have made the usage of mobiles and other communication aids more useful for social contact.

Social networks have removed all the communication and interaction barriers, and now one can communicate his/her perception and thoughts over a variety of topics. Students and experts are able to share and communicate with like-minded people and can ask for the input and opinion on a particular topic. Another positive impact of social networking sites is to unite people on a huge platform for the achievement of some specific objective. This is very important to bring the positive change in society.

A review of Literature has shown that social media has shown significant growth as the preferred medium of communication. Face book and what’s App have captured the fancy of youngsters and together they have conquered 80-90% of the social media usage. The benefits offered by this media, is instant contact anywhere in the world and easy accessibility as communications become faster and faster the world seems to shrink. This medium offers the advantage of contacting several people at the same time through groups and if needed messages can be dispersed to a large number of people, as is done by Advertisement and Promotion of various products and services. One of the great advantages is that smaller size companies can reach out to a large number of customers at a reasonable budget for promoting their wares. The impact of the new social media is tremendous. More and more companies are finding newer means of reaching out to people through this medium. A more recent example is the new wave of election campaigns by all parties.
Introduction

Social media and interpersonal communication have recently been termed a ‘twin concept’, meaning that it may seem impossible to discuss one without deliberating on the other. This reveals the extent to which social media has penetrated into people’s affairs. Social media comes with various platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and other related sites—through which people interact and share information. As versatile and ubiquitous social media and its platforms could be, they are not always accessible to everyone (Ndunge, 2017). A statistical report estimated that 42.3% of the world’s population can access the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2014). Narrowing the report down to Africa, one may marvel that only 26.5% of the entire population consider accessing the Internet a luxury (Internet World Stats, 2014). On interpersonal communication, social media has had great impact (Ndunge, 2017). Also, Fulk and Ryu (1990) noted that there is rarely any aspect of human life that has been influenced immensely by social media than the manner in which people communicate with one another. Some years back, communications technologies transformed people’s way of life (Ndunge, 2017). Hence, interpersonal relationship has witnessed a change via new technologies like the Internet. Relationships that were initially created and maintained through physical interaction have at the moment been complemented by the social technology which is responsible for creating a new form of interpersonal relationships (Nie and Erbing, 2010). Thus, in recent years, there has been a rising concern among several scholars of interpersonal communication, including Subramanian, 2017; Aishwarya and Vinod, 2017; Vevere, 2015; and Drussell, 2012, on the influence of social media on interpersonal communication and relationships. Many of their submissions tilt towards negativity, claiming that social media has done more harm than good in people’s interactions and relationships. Even two of them, Aishwarya and Vinod (2017) maintained that social media is turning to be a bane when it is over used especially among the youngsters.

“Earlier, people used to get irritated when others check their personal diary but now they get irritated if others don’t take any notice of their activities published online” (Aishwarya and Vinod, 2017:137).

Social Media and its History

Traditionally, social media can be traced back to the time before the creation of the
Internet. In the 1960s, Yale Psychologist, Stanley Milgram, began tracking chains of acquaintance. He found that every American was linked to every other American by a chain of around six mutual acquaintances which was later termed as the six degrees of separation (Ndunge, 2017).

According to Ellison and Nicole (2007) an early form of social media, was launched. It allowed users to create profiles, list their friends and see their friends’ friend lists. It was named after the six degrees of separation concept and allowed users to list friends, family members and acquaintances within the site. Six Degrees was followed by more successful social networking sites based on the social-circles network model such as Friendster, MySpace, LinkedIn, XING, and Facebook (Ellison and Nicole, 2007).

Furthermore, in the early 2000s, MySpace, Facebook and WhatsApp were launched(Ndunge, 2017). Thereafter, people from around the world became involved with online social networks. Today’s social media have added many features. They include journal entries, photo albums, video and music sharing.

In 2006, a site called Twitter was launched. It limited users to 140-character "tweets." This is far less information than is found on other sites. But it can more easily be sent to mobile devices. Each member chooses which other members of Twitter they want to "follow." When someone sends out a tweet, everyone who has chosen to follow that member gets the message.

Two recent technological advances have increased the popularity of social media. The first consists of sophisticated, behind-the-scenes programming. It continually updates and syncs member home pages with changes made on the pages of everyone in their network (Ndunge, 2017).

The second change is the increased availability of broadband Internet connections. Not so long ago, in the late 1990s, almost all U.S. users were connecting to the Internet by a dial-up phone line. This technology provided download speeds of between 14 kilobytes of data per second (KBPS) and 56 KBPS. That was fast enough for e-mail and other basic services, but it could not handle the large video, photo, and other media files used in social networking today(Ndunge, 2017).

By early 2009 some 59 percent of US households were using broadband. Broadband speeds can reach one megabyte (1,024 kilobytes) per second (MBPS) and beyond. As a result, users can now easily handle large media files (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). from conventional face-to-face interaction where more effort and calculated thought is needed for mutually beneficial social exchanges.

Methodology

To fully understand the influence social media has on interpersonal communication, in-depth interviews were conducted to gain deep insight into the motive, feelings, and reason why users have chosen social media and to obtain clear understanding by reading between the lines in non-verbal cues (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). The participants (couples)
were selected at Jerico in Ibadan based on non-probability or purposive sampling, because they were selected based on their behavior that is suitable for the study (Babbie, 2001). The interviews were conducted in both one-on-one to enable interactions between interviewer and interviewee(s). In the total of ten interviewees (five couples), five men and women were asked to interview for the mini-study.

Regardless of their differences, they have one thing in common, their frequent usage of social media platforms. Due to the difficulties of time arrangement and location, video calls were taken place to allow interviewer to see interviewees’ interactions and nonverbal cue. The interview questions were open questions which are changed and adapted according to the situation and the flow of the interview, allowing natural flows of the conversation and for the interviewees to feel comfortable to discuss their feelings.

Discussion

Based on the responses of the interviewees and considering the submissions of some of the authors cited previously in this paper, one can actually submit that social media is not entirely bad, neither is it completely good. The implication of this is that social media has both negative and positive impacts on interpersonal communication; however, it (social media) tilts towards the negative side more than the positive side. As earlier noted, the interviewees were selected based on the frequent used of social media platforms. Most of the interviewees have been chosen be in the same generation as the researcher (author) to avoid uncomfortable situations due to the age gap during the interview.

The summation of the interviewee’s submission clarified that social media has benefits, but it is excessively used to reconnect people and communicate information. They believed that social media impact on them and their relationship negatively, but without knowingly. For instance, an interviewee noted thus, “Facebook has impact on my relationships with my friends and family”

A few of the interviewees (about 40%) denied their behaviors on social media. This may be consequent upon the fact that they did not want to admit their bad habits of chatting, and especially phubbing—an act of ignoring others during social events and hours by using smart phones, whether to check WhatsApp or use other chatting applications on social media. In relation to that, a female interviewee claimed that she would only phub when she thought she was free and did not see how this would impact negatively on her personal health, mental and society. Another interviewee strongly believed that social media is one of the necessities of their lives for communication, study, and work in order to maintain good relationships for people afar. Simply put, some of the interviewees felt they used platforms on social media appropriately, especially when they were unoccupied, claiming that social media has no negative impact on their relationships with friends and family and their interpersonal communication skills. On personal development and communicating with people one-on-one, about 65% agreed that social media and other mobile chatting applications are sources of distractions; hence, they are bad. A clear conclusion drawn from the
Interview sessions point out that interviewees all agree to some extent that social media has negatively affected their interpersonal communication skills. The implication of this is that communicating through social media platforms, whether liking, sharing and commenting, have all affected the way they communicate with each other. More poignantly, an interviewee noted thus, “The absence of face to face conversations with my wife badly affected our relationship long time ago. I would go online for hours without paying attention to whatever my wife or children were trying to discuss with me. Even at a point of being compelled to listen, I would hardly contribute to the discussion or with just one-word answers.”

This means that the way we communicate on social media often becomes the habit with which we communicate offline. Other interviewees expressed that sometimes they had to guess the tone of voice and emotions through texts and were having a hard time differentiating sarcasm from sincerity.

Conclusion

With many negative impacts social media has had on interpersonal communication, there is still a number of negative impacts. As earlier established, social media is not totally bad.

Undoubtedly, perpetual or excessive use of social media may jeopardise how humans communicate, interact, associate, maintain and develop their interpersonal relationships.

In many ways has social media changed the way we communicate by relying on virtual interactions and required less face to face communication. To build and maintain a relationship is a process of communicating the level of revelation of personal thoughts and feelings. Bad communication is one of the major factors that damage interpersonal relationships and phubbing (noise in communication) limits the ability of listening. No communication is taken place if not no one is listening. Good communication of the sender and receiver results in maintaining and developing deep relationship intimacies.

References


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