



SOCIAL MEDIA ON FAMILY COMMUNICATION, A STUDY OF ABA METROPOLIS OF ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated social media and its influence on family communication, a study of Aba metropolis. Four specific purposes and four research question guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and was carried out in the three local government area of Aba metropolis namely: Aba North, Aba South and OsisiomaNgwa. The population for this study was 754,927. Simple random sampling was used to determine the sample size of 90 male and females twelve years and above. Questionnaire was used for data collection titled social media on family communication (SMFC). Three lecturers from the department of Home Economics and Hospitality Management Education of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka validated the instruments. Data was analyzed using percentage and frequency. The findings of the study revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp were the mostly used type of social media, 71.1% of the respondents also agreed to use social media daily while 11.1% never use social media. The result also showed that social media imposes problems on family





communication. Creating opportunities for talking with family members, eating together and spending time with children individually among others were agreed as the possible ways of improving family communication. Based on the findings of the study, it was therefore recommended among others that parents should carry out periodic checks on their children to know the social media sites they are using and how long they spend online.

Key words: Social Media, Media, Family, Communication, Family Communication

INTRODUCTION

Many authors over the years have attempted to create a universally inclusive definition for what a family is, and each definition is unique. A few decades ago, the word family, in most people's eyes, referred to a mother, a father, and their children. According to Stephen (2018) family is a social arrangement based on marriage including recognition of rights and duties of parenthood, common residence for husband, wife and children and reciprocal economic obligations between husband and wife. Jaqueline (2019) stated that family is a group of two or more people who share a common goal, similar values, and have a long-term commitment to one another. Anyakoha (2015) sees family as a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption and often characterized by common residence and economic cooperation.

The basic family is a group made up of a man, his wife and their children but other types of family units that exist in Nigeria are; according to Anyakoha (2015), Nuclear family also called monogamous family, it consists of a mother and father, who are married, raising their biological children in one household. It is the standard that many refer to when thinking of the word 'family', the nuclear family is the basic unit from which other forms of family develop. It is the commonest type of family. Anyakoha (2015), sees the second type as Polygamous family, it consists of a man that marries more than one wife and so is made up of a man, his wives and their children. It is mostly found in Africa and Asia. The third type is Extended family which according to Patricia (2020) could be a nuclear family or a polygamous family. An extended family includes the nuclear family, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. In the extended family, the oldest man becomes the head of the family. Some children grow up very close to extended family members, some are raised by their extended family, and some families are not close with their extended family (Anyakoha, 2015).

According to Sanford and Michael (2018), Family types includes Single-parent family which consists of one parent together with their children, where the parent is either widowed, divorced (and not remarried), or never married. Foster family is another type of family where children are taken care of on a temporary basis. Foster homes are used when children need a place to stay for a while, for any reason. It is not common in Nigeria (Anyakoha, 2015). According to Patricia (2020), another family type is





Childless family. It refers to families with two parents who cannot have or do not want kids. The type of family that lives together peacefully and united does not have gap in their communication channel.

Communication is a means of passing information from one entity to another and this is done through different channels. Harper (2018) states that Communication (from Latin *communicare*, meaning "to share") is a 2-way act of conveying meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs, symbols, and semiotic rules. Effective communication is an important characteristic of a healthy Family.

Family communication is a means of passing information within the home amongst family members. According to Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller & Keitner, (2016), Family communication refers to the way verbal and non-verbal information is exchanged between family members. Communication within the family is extremely important because it enables members to express their needs, wants, and concerns to each other. It involves the ability to pay attention to what others are thinking and feeling. In other words, an important part of communication is not just talking but listening to what others have to say (Epstein et al., 2016). Some of the benefits of communication in the family includes; Nurturing and control, Roles, systems and rules implementation, relationship development among couples, adding of children, raising children, balancing intimacy and autonomy, managing conflicts, dealing with violence and changing undesirable behavior, and lots more, Beth and Le poire (2015). Families has different communication patterns.

Family Communication patterns are of four types and they all are based on two orientations; conversation and conformity. Most families have trouble communicating from time to time. However, if conflict abounds, knowing your communication patterns may help you understand why problems arise and how to resolve the issue Noller(2019). Consensual Families: there is conformity within this type of family unit. Ascan and Fitzpatrick (2017) in Family Communication Patterns Theory states that Family members communicate freely about thoughts, feelings and activities, but at the same time, parents are the final decision-makers about important issues. These two orientations become conflicting and lead to tension caused by a desire to be open but also have control. Ascan and Fitzpatrick (2017) stated that in these families, parents usually spend a lot of time explaining their decisions, values and beliefs, and the children learn to value conversation and often adopt the family value system. Families of this nature try to avoid conflict, as it threatens the hierarchical structure in which the parents make choices for the family.

According to Ascan and Fitzpatrick (2017) Pluralistic families are oriented toward conversation and away from conformity. Parents in these families believe in the value of "life lessons," and expect their children to develop through their interactions with people outside the family unit. Decisions are made as a family, with everyone having equal input. These families also engage in open





conflict resolution. They are not afraid of disagreements, and have developed good strategies to resolve differences. Children from pluralistic families learn to be independent, and have confidence in their ability to make decisions. Protective families do not value open conversation and are oriented toward conformity. In these families, one is likely to hear the parent say, "Because I said so," state Ascan and Fitzpatrick (2017) in "Toward a Theory of Family Communication." Children are expected to obey their parents, and parents do not usually share the reasoning for their decisions. Conflict is usually low in these families, because children are oriented toward behaving in accordance with the family norms. However, if conflict does arise, members of these families are ill-equipped to handle the situation. In general, children from these families do not learn to trust their own ability to make decisions (Noller, 2019). Laissez-faire families value neither conversation nor conformity. Family members are often described as "emotionally divorced" from one another. Not much is discussed among members of the family, and parents often do not have an interest or investment in the decisions made by their children. Conflicts tend to be rare in these family situations, as everyone is free to do as they want, however children do not learn the value of conversation, argue (Ascan and Fitzpatrick 2017). This could lead to bridged communication in the home and allow more time for social media interaction.

Social media is an interactive computer-mediated technology that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks, (Obar and Wildman 2015). Kaplan and Haenlein (2019) described in his study that social media is a set of internet-based application that constructs on the ideological and technological foundation of web and that permit the design and exchange of user generated content. Shabnoorand Tajinder, (2016), states that social media is a means of connection among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.

Kaplan et al, (2019) state some ways that social media can be of benefit to the family; one of the benefits of social media on marriage is that couples who spend a lot of time away from each other can keep in touch with each other and feel closer to the other despite the distance. Huisman, (2014) adds that children grow up, go to college and start their own lives. In cases like this, it is easier for parents to keep in touch with their children through the help of social media. With the ability to video chat and share pictures and so on, families who live away from one another are able to close that distance. According to Kaplan et al, (2019), families who have been through a divorce may find social media useful. Children can keep in touch with the parent they do not live with better if they are able to communicate with them on social media. The parents too will not feel as though they are missing out since they will be able to see posts on social media and learn about their child. They will be able to interact more with the child, apart from their scheduled visits.





The relationship that exists between social media, family and family communication has been researched to see the negative and positive impacts on the family. Psychologists are increasingly concerned that technology is breaking down family communication. It can rob families of attention, communication and a feeling of safety within the family unit. According to Sherry (2017) in “Alone Together”, he talked about a study conducted where parents and children were asked their opinion about technology, the results were stunning, and many children reported that they felt their parents were addicted to their phone or computer. Children stated a desire for their parents to spend quality time and interact with them. In other family-impact of social media studies, it was found that when a parent arrived home from work and their children were immersed in technology that the parents were greeted 30% of the time and was ignored 50% of the time (Jacqueline, 2019). Hence, the study seeks to investigate social media on family communication.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to find out how the use of social media has influenced family communication among families of Aba metropolis. Specifically, the study identifies;

1. the type of social media that is mostly used.
2. the duration for the use of social media by different family members.
3. the problems of social media among family members.
4. the possible way forward of improving family communication in Aba metropolis.

Research Questions

This research poses to answer these questions.

1. Which social media type is mostly used?
2. What duration does family members spend on social media?
3. What problems does social media impose on family members?
4. What are the possible ways of improving family communication?





METHODOLOGY

Design of the study

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Nworgu, (2015), descriptive survey design is the research design in which data is collected in a qualitative manner and analyzed using qualitative procedures. Hence, descriptive survey research is suitable for this study as it gets information from family members on social media on family communication in Aba metropolis.

Area of the study

The study was carried out in Aba metropolis of Abia State, Nigeria. Aba metropolis has three (3) L.G.A. that makes it up which are Aba North, Aba South and OsisiomaNgwa. Aba metropolis was chosen as the area of study due of its high level of business activities which leaves family members with an option of communicating through social media, reduces face to face communication and usage of social media on arrival from the day's activity which influences family communication as observed by the researcher who happens to have resided in the area for almost a decade.

Population of the study

The population for this study includes all male and female residing in Aba metropolis. According to the 2016 population census, the total population was 754,927. Three L.G.As made it up which are Aba North (106,844), Aba South (427,421) and OsisiomaNgwa (220,662).

Sampling size and Sampling Technique

The sample size used was 90 male and females that are twelve years and above. Simple random sampling was used to randomly select thirty (30) people from each of the three (3) local government areas that makes up Aba metropolis. Therefore, giving a total of ninety (90).

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used in collecting data for the study. The instrument was developed using a careful analysis of the coverage given to social media on family communication. In developing the instrument, the researcher sought for relevant information through the internet journals and literature all based on the research objectives.

The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections. Section A contains statement to obtain information on personal data from the respondents. Section B was developed based on the four research questions. The questionnaire has a response mode of yes or no.





Method of Data Collection and analysis.

The researcher distributed copies of the questionnaires by hand to the respondents with the help of two trained assistants. The instrument was completed and retrieved the same day. The statistical technique employed in the analysis of data of this study was frequency and percentage. Percentage was used to check the number of agreement or disagreement. Each opinion in the study was involved to two main decisions; agreement or disagreement. An item with a percentage score of 50 and above will be accepted as agreement and item with percentage below 50 will be taken as disagreement.

Table 1: Percentage and frequency distribution of the responses on the social media type that is mostly used.

S/N	social media mostly used	Frequency	Percentage	Decision
1.	Facebook	81	90	Agree
2.	WhatsApp Messenger	67	74.4	Agree
3.	Twitter	29	32.2	Disagree
4.	YouTube	29	32.2	Disagree
5.	Pinterest	21	23.3	Disagree
6.	Instagram	27	30	Disagree
7.	Snapchat	27	30	Disagree
8.	WeChat	18	20	Disagree
9.	Telegram	31	34.4	Disagree
10.	2go messenger	17	18.9	Disagree

Table 1 above shows the type of social media that is mostly used. The result shows that the highest percentage rating that is available is 90 and 74.4 which are above the cut off percentage of 50. This means generally that the social media type mostly used among family members in Aba metropolis is Facebook and WhatsApp. From the table, it is seen that item 10 (2go messenger) has the lowest percentage which shows that it is either not known or has been abandoned with the emergence of new social media sites.





Table 2: Percentage and frequency distribution of the respondents’ responses on the duration spent on social media.

S/N	Time spent on social media	Frequency	Percentage	Decision
1.	Monthly	25	27.8	Disagree
2.	3 times a week	17	18.9	Disagree
3.	2 times a week	27	30	Disagree
4.	Once a week	14	15.6	Disagree
5.	Daily	64	71.1	Agree
6.	1 to 2 times a day	21	23.3	Disagree
7.	3 or more times a day	26	28.9	Disagree
8.	Hourly	12	13.3	Disagree
9.	Constantly	20	22.2	Disagree
10.	Never	10	11.1	Disagree

Table 2 above shows the duration spent by family members on social media. The result shows that the highest percentage rating that is available is 71.1 which is above the cut off percentage of 50. This means generally that 71% of family members 12years and above in Aba metropolis uses social media daily. From the table, it is seen that item 10 has the lowest percentage of 11.1 which shows that only a very few family members do not make use of social media.

Table 3: Percentage and frequency distribution of the respondents’ responses on the problems social media imposes on family members.

S/N	Problems social media impose on family Members	Frequency	Percentage	Decision
1.	ability to become very addictive.	61	67.8	Agree
2.	creates family communication gap	49	54.4	Agree





3.	promotes fake life style	61	67.8	Agree
4.	encourages unfaithfulness between spouses	39	43.3	Disagree
5.	comparison of life style which can lead to depression.	48	53.3	Agree
6.	financial loss from continuous purchase of data/subscription	50	55.6	Agree
7.	deviation of attention	53	58.9	Agree

Table 3 above shows the problems social media imposes on family members. The result shows that a high number of the family members in Aba metropolis agrees strongly that the items in 1-3 and 5-7 are social media factors that imposes problems on family communication. It is also seen from the table, that item 4 (encourages unfaithfulness between spouses) has the lowest percentage of 43.3 which shows that only a few people agree to the statement.

Table 4: Percentage and frequency distribution of the respondents’ responses on the possible ways of improving family communication.

S/N	Possible ways of improving family communication	Frequency	Percentage	Decision
1.	create opportunities for talking with family members.	67	74.4	Agree
2.	members of the family should always eat together.	53	58.9	Agree
3.	going around the room and asking each person to share the high and low points of their day	51	56.7	Agree





4.	spend time with the children individually	48	53.3	Agree
5.	create family traditions such as tucking the kids into bed at night, doing the dishes together, scheduling a monthly 'game night', helping with homework etc.	48	53.3	Agree
6.	children should be involved in family decisions and meetings	48	53.3	Agree
7.	partners should be open to each other when using social media such as sharing of passwords or phone pins.	50	55.6	Agree
8.	family members should limit things shared on social media to avoid sharing private matters	53	58.9	Agree
9.	lifestyle should not be compared with	65	72.2	Agree

Table 4. above shows the possible ways of improving family communication. The result shows that all the items have rating that is above the cut off percentage of 50. This means generally that the possible ways of improving family communication among families in Aba metropolis includes all the items.

Discussion of Findings

The study showed that there are some social networking sites not known or being used by residents of Aba metropolis, it also shows a high percentage of the social media site that is mostly used to be Facebook and WhatsApp messenger which obviously has become a part of life as over 50% of the respondents admitted that they use/visit social media sites on daily bases. Statistical Research Department, (2021) has that the most popular social networking platform is Facebook as it is the first to surpass one billion registered accounts and currently sits more than 2.79 billion monthly active users. According to Sankar and Sudipta, (2019) as of the third quarter of 2020, WhatsApp was the most popular social media in Nigeria. The platform mentioned by 93% of internet users aged 16 to 64years. Facebook





and Youtube followed, being used respectively by 86% and 82% of the individuals with access to the internet.

In view of this, the recent study showed that 71.1% of the respondents spend time on social media daily. However, gap in knowledge can be seen where only 11.1% indicated that they never use social media. The implication is that they either do not have at least a Smartphone with which to connect or they do not know how to operate one.

Findings of this study revealed that 61 (67.8%) of the respondents agreed that the major problems social media imposes on communication in the home are the ability to become very addictive and that it promotes fake life style. Sherry, (2017) states that social media can rob families of attention, communication and a feeling of safety within the family unit. He went on to talk about a study conducted where parents and children were asked their opinion about technology. The results were stunning, many children reported that their parents were addicted to their phone or computer. Furthermore, majority of the respondents disagreed that social media could encourage unfaithfulness between spouses as only 39 (43.3%) agrees with the statement.

The findings also revealed the responses of respondents as regard to ways of improving family communication, a good number agreed that the possible ways listed were essential as seen that up to 50% of the respondents agreed with each of the items.

The results indicate that social media sites have a way of keeping people connected but it has its effects on the family communication. The research further highlights the interest in family members' willingness to go all the way out to improve the communication in the home.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the family members were aware of some different types of social media platforms and its usage length of time. They also admit that it imposes some problems on their communication in the family but they still believe it helps them communicate with other people around the world. The possible ways of improving family communication were highly welcomed and agreed on that it could be of help.

In conclusion, there is need to limit usage of social media to avoid addictions and to create more time for face-to-face family communication.

Recommendation

In the light of this study, the following recommendations were made:





- There should be awareness of the impact of social media on family communication through radio, churches, mosque etc.
- There should be workshop for parents on how to set boundaries for children on the length of time for the use of social media.
- Parents should be enlightened on periodic check on the sites children due visit or have signed up to avoid corruption.
- Government in partnership with ICT personnel and social media site developers can put some restrictions or time frame for use which when exceeded will time the individual out.
- A monitoring team should be in place to scan information, news and videos passed online.
- The study should be carried out in other states in Nigeria

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