The Influence of Social Media use on Communication Preferences between Teenagers and Parents: A Study of St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The emergence of social media and its high use has influenced the way we communicate, including the way family members interact. The aim of this research was to investigate the influence of social media use on communication preferences between teenagers and parents. The specific objectives were to establish: whether Kenyan teenagers preferred social media or face-to-face interaction with their parents; the motivation for social media usage among Kenyan teenagers and the perceived influence of social media use on teenage-parent interaction. The study was anchored in the Media Ecology and Uses and Gratification theories. A descriptive research design was used. The target population was 55 teenagers between the ages of 13 to 19 years who attend Teens Ministry at the St. Peters Kiambu County, Kenya. A stratified census sampling method was used. Data collection instruments were a structured questionnaire and focus group discussions. Data analysis was done using chi-square and correlation techniques. Results: the respondents did not indicate preference between face-to-face interaction with their parents and spending time on social media. Motivation for social media use included to maintain contacts with friends, entertainment and getting information. On influence of social media on teenager-parent relationship, the finding was that social media is amoral and its use does not affect teenager-parent interaction. It merely serves as a tool for facilitating social connection and entertainment during teenagers' relaxation time and to fill in their free time. Recommendation: parents need to avail themselves for face-to-face interactions with their teenagers to enhance bonding and ensure productive and safe use of social media.

Introduction/ Background of the Study

There is high diffusion and use of social media technology among teenagers. Indeed, electronic media occupy a central part of their lives (Boniel-Nissim et al, 2015). A study by Purcell (2012) found that in the USA, 95 % of teenagers aged 12–17 use the internet. Studies have found that generally, social media usage has changed the culture of face-to-face interactions in todays' society. Social media refers to any internet sites that facilitate social interaction (Undiyaundeye, 2014). From this definition, it is clear that the definitive feature of social media is interactivity. The term social media therefore conjures up images of applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Skype, Beboo, LinkedIn, Instagram, Whatsapp, among many others (Ozad & Uygarer, 2014). These applications allow users to create and develop relationships online with a lot of ease and frequency of interactivity (Kamwaria, Kamau, Githaiga, Guantai, Mugwe, Makin, & Dida, 2015). The amount of time teenagers spend on social media networking sites (SNSs) occupies most of their time, raising the question whether and how the use of social media influences teenagers' communication preferences with their parents. Media has been known to transform cultures. As Postman (2000) observed, as society shifts towards more and more media usage, there has been a cultural transformation. In the same breathe, Ong (2006) noted that social, economic, political, religious and other structures are affected by evolving shifts in communication media.

Teenager-parent interaction refers to how often and how much time adolescents spend communicating with their parents face-to-face regarding any matter of interest or concern that either affect or is affected by the teenager, the teenager's parent or people in the teenager's environment (Hoskins, 2014). A healthy teenager-parent interaction is full of reciprocity, closeness, responsiveness, sensitivity and egalitarianism (Branje, 2018). In the olden days, face-to-face interactions between parents and teenagers were the order of the day. A significant aspect of the relationship quality was defined by interacting socially face-to-face. However, this has since been mediated by modern ways of interaction through social media. Parents express concerns about high social media usage by teenagers (Pea, Nass, Meheula, Rance, Kumar, Bamford, Nass, Simha, Stillerman, Yang, & Zhou, 2012).

In South Africa, it has been found that teenage children spend more than one hour everyday on social media devices and more than five hours every week (Van de Merwe, 2013). This means that teenagers could be sparing little time if any for face-to-face interaction with their significant others including parents. It can also be inferred from these trends that the pervasiveness of social media use among teenagers that is reported in the western world is also catching up in Africa, with potential ramifications on teenager-parent interactions. In Kenya, it has been reported that 44% of teenagers aged between ages 15 to 19 years own mobile phones, many of which have social media capabilities (Gichovi, 2012). This high diffusion of social media technology among adolescents explains the growing adoption of social media among this young generation. A study among teenagers in a district in Kenya found that adolescents "cannot imagine a world without social networking sites since they have become part of their everyday activity" (Waigumo, 2011, p.xiii). They spend a lot of time daily on social media and most of them possess or have access to smart phones, the internet and many other forms of modern technology (Moawad & Ebrahem, 2016). Just like their counterparts in South Africa and other parts of the world, this increased use of social media among Kenyan adolescents potentially affects the interaction they have with their parents off-line.

As social media use pervades all aspects of communication, there has been an abrupt shift in the way family members interact and relate following the emergence of the digital era. Mediated teenage-parent interaction

through social media raises concerns that social media could be displacing face-to-face social interactions between teenagers and parents. Research, however, has yielded mixed results on the role of social media in parent-teenage relationships. This study examined how the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) has affected communication preferences between parents and teenagers. The study sought to establish whether SNSs have disrupted teenagers' daily functioning and affected teenager-parent interactions communication preferences. While extensive studies have investigated technology use among families, few studies have examined how frequent exposure to the internet and use of SNSs affects communication preferences between teenagers and their parents.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of social media use on communication preferences between teenagers and their parents and whether use of SNSs has disrupted teenagers' daily functioning and affected teenager-parent interactions.

Objectives of the Study
The specific study objectives were:
1. To establish whether Kenyan teenagers at the St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County, Kenya prefer social media or face-to-face interaction with their parents.
2. To establish the motivation for social media usage among Kenyan teenagers at the St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County, Kenya.
3. To establish the perceived influence of social media use on teenage-parent interaction at the St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County, Kenya.

Research Questions
1. Do Kenyan teenagers at the St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County prefer social media or face-to-face interaction with their parents?
2. What is the motivation for social media usage among Kenyan teenagers at the St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County?
3. What is the perceived influence social media use on teenage-parent relationship among at the St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County, Kenya?

Theoretical Framework
This study was anchored in the Media Ecology and Uses and Gratification theories.

Media Ecology Theory
The media change the way we live and who we are. The Media Ecology Theory has taken up the task of detailing some of the many ways this has happened and will continue to happen. According to the Media Ecology Theory (MET), technology and communication have a social impact (McLuhan, 1964). MET claims that media act directly to shape and organize culture. Media ecology, or the study of how media and communication processes influence human perception, feeling, understanding, and value, is focused around communication studies (Parameswaran, 2008). Marshall McLuhan (1964) understood the influence of technologies including clocks, radios, television, movies, and games. He focused on defining the relationship between technology and members of a specific culture. He noted that electronic media have revolutionized society, and society quickly become reliant on these communication technologies. McLuhan felt that it was almost impossible to find a society

unaffected by electronic media. As society has evolved, its technology has also evolved. From the first books published to the internet, society has both been affected by, and in turn affected, media. MET focuses on the idea that society cannot escape the influence of technology and that technology will forever remain central to almost every action in modern life. The influence of media technology on society is the main concept of MET, upheld by three main assumptions: media is infused into every act and action in society, media fixes our perceptions and organizes our experiences, and media tie the world together. We cannot escape the media presence in our lives as it is ubiquitous in our realities of day-to-day life. Media directly influences us, as they are powerful in our view of the world. Media connects the world into a "global village," where media can tie anyone around the globe into a single social, cultural, political, and economic system (Parameswaran, 2008). As a result, we have the ability to receive information instantaneously. This theory was therefore useful in examining how media, in the form of SNSs, have influenced teenager-parent interactions. Today, thanks to social media, the communication culture in the family has been advisedly affected by the infiltration of social media that seems to have taken over the lives of adolescents. But, how does the use social media influence parent-teenage interactions? The Uses and Gratifications theory provides some pointers.

Uses and Gratifications Theory
Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is a media effects theory that discusses how people actively seek out specific media content for particular purposes and intentional goals (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). The basic premise of uses and gratifications theory is that individuals seek out media that fulfill their needs resulting in ultimate gratification (Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011). UGT presupposes that audiences are active rather than passive, with the ability to consciously examine and evaluate media in order to accomplish specific outcomes (Wang, Fine, & Cai, 2008). West and Turner (2007) observed that UGT "provides a framework for understanding when and how individual media consumers become more or less active and the consequences of that increased or decreased involvement". UGT has five main assumptions: (1) audiences are active and goal-oriented in their media consumption, (2) media are used for gratifications, (3) media are in competition with other means of needs satisfaction, (4) people understand their personal media use, interests, and motives enough to communicate with researchers about their choices, (5) the audience members are the only people who can make judgments regarding the value of the media content. UGT is relevant to understanding the possible influence of social media because social media use is geared towards meeting certain audience needs. By applying uses and gratifications theory, this research sought to provide a better and more comprehensive understanding of why teenagers use social media networks.

Findings – This study identified ten uses and gratifications for using social media. The ten uses and gratifications are: social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others.

Several studies have looked at social media usage among college students (Raju, Valsaraj & Noronha, 2014). However there are few studies that look at social media usage among teenagers, particularly their motivation for use of social media. One study that focused on teens was commissioned by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation (NAAF, 2010). The study found that teens are "digital natives" and that "media consume the lives of teens." (p.2). In another study conducted in 2015 found that "young adults and adolescents are the most prolific users of online social networking sites" (Raju, Valsara & Noronha, 2015, p. 80).

According to Nielsen, one of the research firms that worked on the NAAF study, teens are not "just doing one thing when they consume media. They split their enormous media time among many activities – social

networking, viewing video, exchanging Instant Messages, viewing graphics and photos, listening to music, watching TV, playing games, looking up things, even catching up on the news – often simultaneously," (ibid). Goldeck (2015) ranked the top 10 most popular SNS by the year 2014. This is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Top ten popular social media sites

SNS	Short descriptor	Number of users
1. Facebook	SNS with multiple features and interactivity	1.2 billion
2. Twitter	A microblogging website where people create social connections through "tweets."	300 million
3. YouTube	Video-sharing website where people can watch videos without having an account.	Not relevant
4. LinkedIn	A business-oriented SNS targeting professionals	250 million
5. Pinterest	A social bookmarking site centered around sharing images from the web	150 million
6. Google+	Owned by Google	120 million
7. Tumblr	A microblogging website that does not limit length of content	110 million
8. Instagram	A photo-sharing website	85 million
9. VK	Similar to Facebook	80 million
10. Flikr	An image and video hosting website	65 million

Source: Goldbeck (2015, p. 12)

However, two years later, a study by Knight-McCord et al. (2016) found that Instagram was the most used SNS followed by Snapchat with Facebook taking the third position. Linkedin and Pinterest were the least used SNSs among college students. Empirical results suggest that social media preference may be influenced by various motives for social media use. Studies done among students aged 18 to 28 years show that social media preference depends on whether the user wants to connect with friends, share photos, stay in touch with family or get entertained (Ezumah, 2013).

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between the amount of time spent on social media and the quality of human relationships. One of the key theories of family communication focuses on the family as a set of relationships (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1993). Although the interaction between parents and teenagers continue to diminish as teenagers gravitate towards independence, parents continue to play a prominent role in teenage development (Collins & Laursen, 2004).

Existing literature suggests that teenagers' social media use is taking a toll on family relationships and face to face interaction with parents has not been spared. (Duque, San Antonio & Brazil, 2017) found that the time that teenagers consume on SNSs is directly affected the quality of teenager-parent interaction. Open, face-to-face communication with parents has been found to diminish the more time teenagers spend on social media (Duque et al., 2017).

A study by Knight-McCord et al. (2016) concluded that 76% of teenagers spend 1-10 hours on SNS daily and 80% spent more than 10 hours on the weekend. From these statistics, it can be inferred that teenagers spend a significant part of their waking hours on social media and only leave out the little time remaining to other aspects of their lives including interacting with their parents. The findings revealed that SNSs are predominantly used for social purposes, mostly related to the maintenance of established offline networks. Negative correlates of SNS

usage included the diminished real life social participation and relationship problems. This means that teenage-parent interaction with each other face to face is potentially negatively affected.

Shokeen and Jain (2014) study aimed to gauge the attitude of parents and teenagers of the age of 16 years towards SNSs. Results showed that parents had a negative perception of teenagers' use of social media and recommended limiting their use of SNSs. The parents in the study reported decrease in face-to-face interactions with their teenagers.

Research Methodology
Lays out the specific procedures and techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about the influence of social media use on communication preferences between teenagers and parents.

Design of the Study
A descriptive research design was used. This provided a snapshot of the current state of social media use and teenage-parent interaction. The use of Ministry at the St. Peters Parish, Kiambu County in Kenya, allowed for focus within a particular population or group of interest who in this case were the church teens.

Population of the Study
The target population was 55 teenagers between the ages of 13 to 19 years who attend the Teens Ministry at the St. Peters Kiambu County, Kenya. Due to the small size of the target population, a stratified census method was used. A structured questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions were used as the data collection method. St Peters Anglican Church in the Githurai Archdeaconry of Nairobi Diocese is situated in Kiambu County, Kenya with a congregation comprising of middle income population, with majority of the residents being homeowners. The Church has 600 members, of which 500 are adults and 100 youths. Shrews et al. (2015) describe teenage age as an age when ideas begin to be formed and autonomous decisions are made which are devoid of parental involvement. It has also been documented that when a child reaches teenage, parental relationship is displaced by peer groups who assume increasing importance as the primary source of social influence (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). The target population is classified by gender as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Population distribution

Strata	Population
Male teenagers	23
Female teenagers	32
Total	55

Sample and Sampling Techniques
Given that the target population was only 55 teenagers, census method was used. The sample was therefore all the 55 teenagers accounting for 100% of the population as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Sampling size distribution

Strata	Sample size	Percent
Male teenagers	23	41.8%
Female teenagers	32	58.2%
Total	55	100.0%

Instruments for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument while Focus Group Discussions were conducted to provide supplementary qualitative data. The study adapted the Social Networking Time Use Scale (SONTUS) developed by Olufadi (2016). The index was developed and tested as a standardized measurement of the time spent on SNSs. Data on Teenage-Parent Interaction was collected using the Parent-Adolescent Relationship Scale (PARS) developed by Hair et al. (2005). This is an 8-item scale that is considered to be psychometrically sound for measuring the interaction between resident parents and their teenage children. The scale was particularly suitable for the study since it focuses on the perspectives of the teenagers.

Method of Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered and their use complemented with Focus Group Discussions (FGD). An FGD schedule was prepared for this purpose. The schedule was used to obtain information about feelings of research participants concerning social media use and adolescent-parent interactions. Data was collected from two focus groups of 8 participants each, recruited on voluntary basis. One group comprised of male participants of different ages and the other group comprised of female participants. The researcher was the facilitator while two research assistants were recruited and trained to do note taking and record observations

Method of Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Chi-square and correlation techniques because it is robust for testing associations and significance in nominal, interval, ordinal and ratio data. Spearman's rank correlation technique was applied because the two psychometric tools (SONTUS and PARS) are measured on a 5-point Likert type scale. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented in figures and tables. The FGD data was analyzed using Nvivo statistical software, using thematic analysis approach.

Findings/ Results

Results showed that teenagers at St. Peters' Parish were active social media users. The studied teenagers indicated that they did not have a preference between interacting with their parents and spending time on social media. There was no statistically significant correlation between social media preference and teenager-parent interaction. Results also showed a weak negative but statistically insignificant correlation between respondents' time spent on social media and teenager-parent interaction. Similarly, there was a statistically insignificant positive correlation between respondents' attitude towards social media and teenager-parent interaction. A total of 30.2% and 34.9% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that they enjoyed spending time with their parents. With regard to parental supportiveness based on parameters such as praise, level of criticism, help with important things, frequency of blame and mutual planning, the study found that a warm, supportive relationship existed between the adolescent-parent interactions. Respondents were asked to describe the state of their relationship with their parents in general. Emerging themes were identified and categorized into three: positive, indifferent and negative. 77% of the respondents used positive adjectives to describe the state of their relationship with their parents. Examples of the adjectives used include "amazing", "close enough", "very interactive and awesome". This finding contradicts the observation made by Chen and Bernard (2006) that teenage-parent interaction are mostly characterized by incidences of conflict and reduced warmth.

Respondents made average use of social media, with the highest time use manifesting during relaxation and free periods and for various motives. Social media was a way of occupying idle time when parents were away, but it neither complemented nor displaced face-to-face interactions. On average, respondents spent the longest time period on social media when in need to maintain contact with existing friends (M=6, SD=4.25), when in need to

find people they haven't seen for a while (M=5, SD=4.04) and to find out more about people they have met offline (M=4, SD=3.67). This finding compares well with results of a study in Los Angeles, USA by Espinoza and Juvonen (2011) which found that most of the teenagers' time spent on social media was used for catching up with friends and peers. This finding implies that the primary reason for social media use was to interact online with friends. This was expected because teenage is characterized by a time when the need for interaction with peers and friends is predominant. The teenagers spent more time on social media than with their parents. Most of the respondents spent more than an hour on social media every day and this did not vary by gender or age. Respondents made average use of social media, with the highest time use recorded during relaxation and free periods. WhatsApp and Instagram were the teenagers' most preferred social media platforms. One reason for the ubiquity of WhatsApp among these respondents is that unlike other social media sites such as Facebook where unsolicited friend requests can intrude one's account, WhatsApp offers exclusive control which makes it appealing for family use.

The third objective was to establish the influence of social media usage on respondents; attitude towards teenager-parent interaction. The findings indicate that there was no statistically significant negative correlation between social media preference and teenager-parent interaction. There was a weak negative but statistically insignificant correlation between respondents' time spent on social media and teenager-parent interaction. There was a statistically insignificant positive correlation between respondents' attitude towards social media and teenager-parent interaction. Majority of the respondents agreed that they felt more connected to their parents during face-to-face interactions. Most of the respondents agreed that their face to face moments with parents was always fun. Most of the respondents agreed that social media is a good thing but should not replace face to face interactions with parents.

Conclusions and Implications

It was concluded that social media is amoral and its use does not affect teenage-parent interaction. It is merely a tool for facilitating social connection and for entertainment during adolescent's relaxation time which does not interfere with the dyadic relationship between the parent and the teenager. Social media was indicated as neither complementing nor displacing face-to-face interactions, but as occupying teenager' idle time mainly due to the physical absence of the parents. It is therefore the parents that need to adjust their daily itinerary and reallocate more time to be with their teenage children. This is because the teenagers used social media mostly during their relaxation and free periods, meaning that social media use was not significantly interfering with their other important priorities such as academics and face-to-face interactions with parents. However, since social media was used by adolescents to foster connection, for information and entertainment, a reasonable level of parental guidance may be necessary to protect their children from harmful exposures. The quality of teenager-parent relationship could however be enhanced by engaging in more face-to-face interactions.

Parents should further provide guidance to their teenagers on responsible use of social media in order to protect them from potentially harmful friends, information or entertainment. The implication of this is that parents themselves need to keep abreast of the technological changes, be knowledgeable on how to operate emerging social media applications and devices and stay current in terms of current affairs in the social media world. They also need to set a good example to the teenagers on responsible social media use.

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