

Social media and Social Transformation in Uganda's families

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Abstract

The development and application of social media, has transformed Ugandan social life. Transformations are seen in the way Ugandans are socializing with one another and in the way families utilize their free time.

Through a questionnaire survey, and interviews the paper examines the way technology development is transforming the social family cycle in Uganda. It further examines the challenges faced by families as a result of application of social media. Finally the paper proposes strategies of solving the challenges.

This paper will benefit Ugandans and the people beyond, the researchers and educational administrators including the proponents of social media.

Key words:

Social media; Social Transformation

Introduction

Social media applications have become increasingly popular components of our everyday lives in today's globalizing society. Social media provides a context where people across the world can communicate, exchange messages, share knowledge, and interact with each other regardless of the distance that separates them (Sawyer, 2011). Technological developments world over have made the internet an innovative way for individuals and families to communicate. Family members use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace to create and sustain relationships with others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These social media sites let those who use them create personal profiles, while connecting with other users of the sites; users can upload photographs, post what they are doing at any given time, and send personal or public messages to whomever they choose. In this "information age," social media sites seem to be growing in popularity rapidly, especially among young adults (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2008).

As technology evolves in Uganda, interaction is growing in an increasingly rapid way. Undoubtedly, social media will become even more influential and powerful both at the macro/societal level and the micro/individual level especially in the next few years.

Social media plays a particularly important role in Ugandan families and its ongoing transformation due to a number of factors. First, the country not only has a large number of internet service providers, but it also has many telecommunication companies and smart phone dealers providing smart phones that have social media applications putting Uganda among one of the world's users of social media users with an internet integration of 5 million people in its urban centers (Harrison, 2015). Second, the continuing growth of social media use and the constant, yet unpredictable social change taking place in Uganda mean that in the "Era of Social Media" the country is and will be confronted everyday with new and tough challenges.

Statement of the problem

Ugandans are adopting new technologies which have done away with barriers and boundaries that used to characterize personal interactions and communication within the public realm.

They have adopted the use of social media in the absence of a regulatory policy. This has facilitated the sharing of even the most intimate details of individual lives for good, but sometimes for worse (for example, when posts are malicious).

The internet and social media allows people to interact and communicate with each other in real time through different kinds of platforms (Flinck, 2011).

Social media imposes no boundaries on what can be shared. This study, therefore, sought to examine social media social transformation in Ugandan families with a view of establishing if it's used, how it is used, any challenges encountered and then propose recommendations that are appropriate to users.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives;

- To establish if Ugandans use social media.
- To find out the devices they use to access social media.
- To establish if Ugandan face any challenges when accessing social media.

Significance of Study

This study is important because it shows how social media is leading to social transformation. Sociability is an underlying aspect in using different social media applications such as, facebook, twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace and Whatsapp. Since these are gaining popularity at a fast pace, it is important to understand the effects on family and personal communication. Social media networks offer a straightforward way to converse with peers, family members and get feedback, as well, which may influence a family member or a young adult's self-esteem (Pempek et al., 2008). For example, In Uganda Whatsapp and Facebook are used primarily by family members to maintain relationships with individuals they are acquainted with who live near and far and to communicate family related matters easily (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Facebook makes it simpler to communicate with multiple people at one time. Social media applications may also make it easier for users to monitor activities of people they have not seen in a while and those that are far away from them as well as reconnecting with new and old friends (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

Literature Review

An overview of social media

Social media is used as a media for social interaction that allows for people to communicate and engage with information that is quickly accessible on the Internet.

In today's society, there are increasing numbers of Internet users and to so many social media has become more popular in their daily communication patterns and routines. The communication that occurs in these online contexts promotes interactive dialogues that build understanding of different points of view. "Social media means that everyone is a publisher and everyone is a critic" (Georgetown University, 2010).

There are no boundaries in social media; there is no content control and filter. Every user can publish and any one can criticize. Social media refers to the means of interactions among people and the ways in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. It has become an integral part of life, and can now be considered to be a mainstream mode of communication. This applies to all ages although the majority of users are youth (Back et al..., 2008).

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social network sites as public web-based services that allow users to develop a personal profile, identify other users ("friends") with whom they have a connection, read and react to postings made by other users on the site, and send and receive messages either privately or publicly. Individuals may choose to send private messages, write on other users' walls, organize social activities, and keep informed about other user's' daily activities. However, users can limit themselves on what information they would like to share publicly with others. Some items they may choose to include are: pictures, favorite books and movies, birthday, relationship status, and location (Tufekci, 2008).

There are a range of post adoption contact activities including communication through social networking sites, texting and instant messaging using mobile technologies and emailing between each other which is adopted by children and adults (Hessle, 2014)

Web based technology is not the same as using these social media application like facebook, whatsapp, you tube, and twitter or having access to the content of these media platforms rather each of these terms manifests in a technological aspect (Bucy & Newhagen, 2004).

Social media applications (YouTube, LinkedIn, twitter, facebook) include both access and the actual use of social media technologies and content, while also taking into account the context or place of media use. Domestication theory makes clear that media content cannot be disconnected from media technology (Silverstone, 1994). In this respect, Silverstone (1994) argued that social media applications are 'double articulated', both as an object (first articulation) and as a message (second articulation). However, due to tendencies of social media convergence object (technology) and message (content) are not always coupled anymore (Jenkins, 2006). Moreover, the technologies used for media consumption differ in

their characteristics when the media message is the same; they are also used in different contexts (Hartmann, 2006).

Social Transformation

Social transformation is the process by which individual/s alter the socially ascribed social status of their parents into a socially achieved status for themselves. However another definition refers to large scale social change as in cultural reforms or transformations. The first occurs with the individual, the second with the social system.

Social transformation is increasingly used to describe societal changes and generally indicates a critical stance towards older notions of the idea of development. It is considered as the change of society's systemic characteristics. This incorporates the change of existing parameters of a societal system, including technological, economic, political and cultural restructuring (Castles: 2000)

Social system Transformation

Social transformation in this context requires a shift in collective consciousness of a society - local, state, national or global - so that reality is refined by consensus. This often happens by external stimulus and sometimes intentionally.

Methodology

In order to discover the impact social media has on social transformation of Ugandan families, we conducted a questionnaire survey among 40 Ugandans from the different four regions that make up Uganda.

We also carried out interviews with 02 family members from 08 families representing each 02 members representing a region of Uganda.

The participants were recruited by the researchers from two districts of each region. These participants were selected randomly from the two districts in the four regions.

The study was carried out with a view to finding out if people know about social media, the devices they use with social media, if they find any challenges while using social media.

Table 1 Participants per region (See Appendix I)

Region	Male	Female
Central	5	5
Eastern	5	5
Northern	5	5

Western	5	5
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Table 2 Participants per family (See Appendix II)

Region	No. of family members
Central	2
Eastern	2
Northern	2
Western	2

Table 3 participants per district

Region	District	Male	Female
Central	Wakiso	02	03
	Mityana	03	02
Eastern	Mbale	03	02
	Busia	02	03
Northern	Arua	03	02
	Gulu	02	03
Western	Mbarara	03	02
	Rukungiri	02	03

Response rate

Out of the 40 target participants from each region who received questionnaires, 32 answered and returned them to the researchers and out of the 08 family members who were supposed to be interviewed, researchers managed to interview only 07 members.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves examining the patterns that emerge from the participants' responses to the questions

Table 4: Know about Social media

Regions	Male	Female	Percentage%
Central	04	03	70
Eastern	05	03	80

Northern	04	05	90
Western	04	04	80
Total	17	15	80

(Data 2016)

From the above table, it can be seen that out of 40 participants including male and female from all the 4 regions in Uganda, 04 male and 03 female participants from central region making it 70% know about social media, in the eastern region 05 male and 03 female which is 80% while northern region 04 male and 05 female making it 90% and Western 04 male and 04 female which is 80% know about social media.

A total of 17 out of 20 were male participants while 15 out of 20 female which makes the 80% of the responded who know about social media in Uganda.

According to the interview carried out from the members of all the four regions, two members from the central region know that social media exists. One respondent said, "I know social media exists and I can use it especially facebook, and you tube" and another said that he knew social media from his classmates who were always chatting in the holidays on facebook..

From the eastern region respondents also knew about social media. One respondent said, "I have known social media since my senior six vacations in 2013 when I joined facebook and I used to communicate a lot with my cousin in New York on Skype".

Another one said, "I used to see dad laughing alone every time he was in the living room with his phone until I asked him what he was always doing with his phone and he told me that he what sapping with his friends."

One respondent from northern region said, "I know social media because I chat with my cousin who lives and works in Nairobi - Kenya on facebook everyday".

In western region all the respondents interviewed knew about social media. One respondent who is a clerk in High Court Mbarara acknowledged that she first heard about social media when her friends were telling her to join facebook in 2008 while the other said, "I know social media and I use it to down load music to my phone".

Table 5: the devices used with social media

Regions	Mobile phones	Computers	Total	%Mobile phones	% Computers
Central	05	02	07	71	29
Eastern	04	04	08	50	50
Northern	07	02	09	78	22

Western	06	02	08	75	25
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(Data 2016)

From the study, 71% of the respondents from the central region use mobile phones to access social media while 29% use computers, 50% use mobile phones and 50% use computers according to the respondents from the eastern region, where as 78% of the respondents from northern region use mobile phones to access social media 22% use computers and 75% of the respondents from the western region use mobile phones while 25% of them use computers.

According to the interviewees' mobile phones and computers are the mainly used devices for social media according to all respondents from all the regions; one respondent from the central region said," I purposely bought a smart phone to have access to whatsapp, and facebook". Another one said," as long as I have my phone loaded with Mbs to chat with my friends, boredom is no more".

A respondent from Eastern Uganda said, "We have no electricity but am always in touch with my friends on facebook using my phone I always make sure that I take it for charging in our neighbor's home who has a solar charger". The second respondent interviewed in the same region said, "first thing when I enter office is to switch on my computer and log on to my facebook account".

From the northern region, the respondent said, "I visit a café once or twice in a week to catch up with my friends of facebook".

From the western region, one respondent said, "Most of my free time is spent on my computer chatting with my relatives in Kampala and Kigali", while the other said that with his smart phone he makes it a point to communicate with all his friends on a daily basis.

Table 6: Challenges faced while using social media

Challenges	Central	Eastern	Northern	Western	No.	%
Posting of inappropriate and upsetting information on the site	04	02	01	02	09	38%
Cyber bulling and Harassment from someone of the opposite sex	02	03	02	04	11	46%
Sexting	02	03	01	01	07	29%
Power constraints	01	04	06	03	14	58%

(Data 2016)

The study shows the challenges faced by social media users in Uganda. According to the study, 38% of the respondents face the challenge of posting of inappropriate and upsetting information on the social media site, 46% face a challenge of Cyber bullying and Harassment from someone of the opposite sex, Sexting defined as “sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs, or images via cell phone, computer, or other digital devices.” was a challenge faced by 29% of the respondents and 58% the biggest percentage faced the challenge of power constraints.

Discussion

Know about Social media

The study shows that 80% of the respondents know about social media in Uganda. This corroborates with Rosen et. al (2010) who describes how people from individualistic cultures focus on meeting new people and being seen by many people. The scholars add that people from collectivistic cultures utilize social network sites to “maintain close relationships with a small number of ties instead of creating new connections with people” (Rosen et. al, 2010).

Devices used to access social media

From the study most social media users use their mobile phones to access social media just as (Nowak, 2008) talks about the iPhone and how it is used to because of its new innovative features, such as the touch screen and wireless Internet access, and it encompasses different applications that include Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. People use it mostly to connect with others on social media sites in a convenient, accessible manner; they can interact on the Internet without being face-to-face.

Challenges faced when using social media

The findings show that in Uganda power is a major challenge to social media challenges followed by Cyber bullying and online harassment from someone of the opposite sex, posting of inappropriate and upsetting information on the site and sexting. Social media users in Uganda are faced with challenges like any other social media user around the world. This confirms the findings of Ezean and Iyvesi (2012) who say that there are a number of challenges associated with use of social media. They identify in particular lack of a maintenance culture, unreliable power supply and inadequate training of users.

Conclusion

The present study shows that social media are used in Uganda and have led to transformation in the communication sector. Facebook, whatsapp and Twitter have continued to grow in popularity. Use of social media is a new way of communication with friends and family and also influence individual's' Communication habits. Social media applications also offer new

and innovative way to communicate with other individuals in a quick manner. Computer-mediated communication provides individuals with easier and faster ways of communication. In addition, individuals are using social media applications at an increasing rate. This study makes an important contribution to understanding use of social media in Uganda and it's their effect in transforming social individual and group communication and self- concept.

Directions for Future Research

There are several aspects in which this study was limited. However, these limitations suggest a direction for future research. First, due to time and financial constraints, we only handled 8 districts out of 135 districts handling only two districts per region out four regions and only two family members per region. Handling a bigger group from each region would be beneficial in creating a bigger understanding of our study.

Future studies could also be conducted to focus on why use of social media is on the rise in Uganda and why social media has created such a popular phenomenon in communication compared to other communication channels. Since there are high numbers of usage for both young and adults in Uganda, it would be interesting to understand why people use social media so frequently. Another area of research worth pursuing is the usage of social media sites in the younger teenagers and the older baby-boomer generation. As these websites become more popular, it would be a worthy topic to research. Lastly, there should be more research done on comparison of the communication before and after social media.

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