

Sociological and Philosophical Perspectives on the Ethics of Social Media: *An African's Diary*

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Abstract

Many, including traditional rulers and scholars alike have admonished subjects and, indeed all indigenous citizens all over Africa, to reinvigorate commitment to the value and employment of indigenous language because it's uniquely a people's ultimate source of identity and solidarity as against the lasciviousness or abstruseness offered by the foreign or imported format/electronic social media. This opinion implies that the imported platforms offer indigenous languages relegation, disuse, stagnation and disappearance as means of communication – which, of course, is the transference of thought and meaning, achieved through language. And through language one communicates values, admittedly also across cultures. And developments in modern technology have mostly enhanced (whether or not they apply) those media (social) of internalizing foreign accretions universally with untold consequences for indigenous cultural values and morality. Accordingly, the imperative of this paper is to perspectives those sociological (social impact) and philosophical issues (ethical consideration) arising from that development. By critical analysis, the paper adumbrates how the adaptation and application of contemporary social media has adversely affected cherished traditional values. It concludes that modern social media is replete with both transmitting immorality and affording the widest medium for anyone to communicate same across the world. The work recommends, however, that although the social media has enhanced channels of communication, its applicability should be censored and subjected to cultural suitability test, which is the only way to preserve cherished core traditional values/morality – which essence should be taught to the youthful user at some early stage in life.

Background to the Study

Recently, in his majesty's inaugural address as 40th Oba of Benin (on 28th October, 2016), Oba Ewuare the II admonished his subjects and, indeed all indigenous citizens all over Africa, to reinvigorate commitment to the value and employment of indigenous language because it's uniquely a people's ultimate source of identity and solidarity as against the lasciviousness or abstruseness offered by the foreign or imported format/electronic social media. This opinion implies that the imported platforms offer indigenous languages relegation, disuse, stagnation and disappearance. The Oba must have, in his itinerary as former Nigerian Ambassador to several nations, rightly observed the adverse impact of the contemporary communication media. Of course, communication (the transference of thought, values and meaning) is achieved through language—admittedly also across cultures—and developments in modern technology have mostly enhanced (whether or not they apply) those media of internalizing foreign accretions universally with untold consequences for indigenous cultural values and moral rectitude. Accordingly, there is the need to perspectives those sociological (social impact) and philosophical issues (ethical consideration) arising from this development; there is the need to adumbrate how the adaptation and application of contemporary social media has adversely affected cherished traditional values. This paper is so much about the development of effective electronic technology as much as the goal or wisdom of such devolution. We shall argue that modern social media is replete with both transmitting immorality and affording the widest medium for anyone to communicate same across the world. The arguments shall base on an analytic explanation of the concepts of language, art and social media in the context of communication; and doing this helps open the grounds for an evaluation of the sociological/philosophical issues of same in the context of ethics and moral standards/desirability.

Language as Art and Communication

Generally, art is any object or product of some artistic process, an artifice including natural features such as ant-hills, mountains and rocks. Art has an *end*. Art is communicative record of man's emotional response to his existence. Tolstoy sees it as consisting in "...one by any means of certain external signs hand on to others feelings he had lived through and others are infected by these feelings and also experience them" (Nwala, 1985). Besides the artist, there is the contemplator. Art depicts an environment, a context and culture. *Art* could be classified according to the medium through which it is appreciated. Accordingly, there are visual, auditory, literary, audio-sensory/mixed art. Social media today embodies all of these. Art is symbolic and a language; social media is a unique language. Language is the basis of culture; culture determines moral standard; therefore the morality of an art is culture dependent. However, the sphere of morality is a difficult one because it concerns with the wrongness or rightness of any act. Hence, one is expected to act according to accepted norms and values of a society or social system; or, simply to live a virtuous life. Thus morality tailors human activity towards virtue and good life. Art works sometimes represent traits of culture—fictional or actual—as expressed in language. Today, social media transcends cultures.

Social media tends to create a universal language, to institute a universal culture. Regrettably, this has introduced untold challenges to cultural specifics. Besides, the social media has become the world's widest, fastest, yet most corruptive channel of communication. It has thereby become the harbinger of (often false) information and compendium of cultures and values, irrespective of time and place, whether or not they apply. The question, therefore, is: Is there no ethical standard for the applicability of the social media or do not we need such? The attempt to address these questions is the imperative of this work. Perhaps we may just begin by stipulating the relationships between art, language, and communication; such would enable us to fathom an ethical paradigm for the social media – which is today's dominant language.

Language is the means of human communication; and the concept is an eclectic one. An instance of language is the arrangement of vocal sounds conventionally representing concepts, feelings, objects, and other aspects of culture; others as in gestures, animal sounds, and involving some special set of symbols, rules, used for transmitting information, as in a computer (Webster, 1978). Like eating and sleeping, language is common to all mankind; but unlike them, it is not but must be learned as member of the group to which one belongs. This enables the user to have a relationship with cultural elements and the relationship they bear to the world (Blackburn, 1996). Linguistic forms have powerful control over the minds of people and “draw *their* mental gaze in a certain direction” (Anyanwu, 2000). Language carves out some route which people follow as a matter of habit. Hence we say that language is the channel through which we express such habits; it carries and defines what is carried. This implies that language expresses reality, in both the utterance and the learned understanding or meaning. Man is born, but without words or concepts; he learns and acquires them and develops his mind through the development of communication. And the objectivity of concepts is guaranteed by their social provenance. Language is communication itself; society is language; therefore language is society. Communication is the transference of a thought-content from one person or group of persons to another person or group of persons; language is the vehicle of this transference – as words, gestures and artefacts (Wiredu, 1983).

The fundamental presuppositions of communication include shared meaning/values, ought-content (which is culturally determined). Uniquely, (spoken) language is exclusively a *human phenomenon*; its variety is dependent on man's creativity. By it, man expresses his thought, will, emotion, desires, intentions and purposes. Thus, language is a purposive behaviour. By expressing our purposes, wills or desires, language also connotes a kind of voluntary act. And the reasonability or logicity of such expressions depends on ones grasp of the constitutive elements and their functions. Language is transparent: it draws our attention to extra-linguistic phenomena, to truth, falsehood and friction; it is objective and universal: is used by all men, irrespective of style, place, origin, and time; it is beyond socio-political, educational and physical deficiencies. It is, thus, a mark of rationality and consciousness. Language is relative: even though language is universal, it's is still dependent on culture and thus, get its meanings and references via culture. Hence meaningfulness is basis of language. Unfortunately, the social media completely is today's universal language; contemporary social media contradict all the

basic features of language and communication. We use language for praying, requesting, directing, informing, expressing, reporting, speculating, singing, teasing, asking, quarrelling, greeting, etc. Thus they, however, are grouped as declarative/informative, emotive/ expressive, directive, interrogative, or serving multiple functions of language.

Even though socially we cooperate, humans also disagree and resolve our differences through language – even though disagreement about facts could easily be resolvable by further experience; but that about belief/attitude is not easily so; it requires persuasion and further definitions based on dispositions, culture, aspirations, and values. Such is the case we find ourselves now with the (lack of) ethics of social media, which definition is mostly stipulative – again, a stipulation relatively determined, even though recent developments around the world tend to make it universal.

Situating the Problem

Generally, art is an informative/educative and entertaining human representation; but it could be eminently socially corruptive. The corruptiveness and nastiness of the art of social media is both quantitatively and qualitatively inestimable. Through the employment of social media, countless families have been rendered destabilized, sometimes dissolved; individual privacy is plundered, characters decimated, and falsehood propagated; persons have been deceived and got their heads cut off; and corruption, injustices, immoralities advertised to the parent and child alike, to the lay and pious altogether. Child-upbringing and control has eluded the world, particularly the African world which deeply values moral behavior. Given that the scientific development is a dynamic process, and that the function of reason is to promote the art of life, recent technology has not tended to promote the art of life, especially in entertainment and amorous activity (in music, dressing style, values, art, drama, etc.). Unregulated video theaters continually spread across the world; these makeshift shafts are now open to people of any age, including children. Pornography has become standard farce and hassled to a loss of primary cultural values – those values which, for instance, forbid children and young adults to discuss sex-related topics much less practice such. Today, the *selfie* allows for personal adverts replete with different postures of nudity; irresponsible immoral disorder becomes inevitable in the 'contagious effect' and social dislocations everywhere. For example, "next-to-nudity" has become the ideal fashion, indecent exposure, violent attractions, rape, and perversion pervades nations. Able youths waste away glued to cell phones and other electronic/communication media, platform or device for charting, twitting, and so on non-virtues. Contemporary milieu, with the social media as catalyst, represents the acme of moral degeneracy; this condition needs to be evaluated with a conviction for its emendation.

Aims/Objectives of the Study

The major aim of this work is to ex-tray the consumption of social media. In the process, it is intended that the concept of morality and its province be defined. In this way, the sociological and philosophical considerations of the platform should be highlighted. In the end and with suitable/vivid illustrations, it is hoped, it would be indicated how the

applicability of social media (as enhanced means of communication) is divested of any moral values; that, rather, it is replete with epistemological, social, and moral infamies—which themselves are a pedestal for legal disputations, a basis for social disintegration.

I. The Methodology of Study

The method adopted in this work is simply critical analyticity, in which case we look into extant literature on art/communication to explain, review, and evaluate the presuppositions contained in the creation, conception, and application of the social media with a view to amending or modifying it. This method relies simply on up-to-date and reliable secondary sources of information: printed (books, newspapers, magazines, and journals) or soft (the internet/social media); its analyticity posture is qualitative. Although the work is initially descriptive, in the end, it would be normative, including a reference today-to-day live examples of the misuses of the social media platform.

ii. The Social Media

By social media is meant the computer-mediated technologies that allow the creating and sharing of information, ideas, career interest, and other forms of expression via visual communities and networks. This definition is succinct because it encapsulates communication in contemporary society involving all computer/electronically propelled “electronic communication (as websites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create on-line communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos) (Webster, 2004). However, socially, this medium has helped to fast track information dissemination and communication across the globe; it has re-united old friends; and has helped to build relationships. It follows that the social media has provided immense sociological value. The intention of the media would be impeccable but for the fact that each of its applicability has a corresponding perversion. This brings to question the real intent of its inventing and spread. Let us take a few examples.

It is doubtful if any one, besides the development of the atomic bomb in the 1940s, would sit down and develop a formula to hurt the world or humanity. Hence the initial intent of developing the social media must be lofty. The values of the platform are embedded in its desirable usages. To be specific, *WhatsApp* allows for *chatting*, sending personal pictures, songs, porn videos and making calls at a much reduced rates irrespective of distances and circumstances. The *Facebook* offers old friends and families, who may have been out of contact for decades, the opportunity to re-link; it has become a rich platform for education and enlightenment of the goings-on around the world. Similarly, the *Blackberry*, *Android* and other devices provide special platforms not only for *chatting* but for *pinging* and other *voice notes*. *Pinging* is often a prolonged conversation/dialogue between two intimate partners on any subject (but most often of erotic basis). Better still, the *Instagram*, like the *twitter*, visualizes *chatting*, encourages *video chatting* (especially between friends and families), easy access to celebrities' life style, and allows users to know the latest trends around the world. Nevertheless, the question is asked, what is the philosophical underpinning of the social media? What are the ethical considerations and flops of the platforms? These issues may well be trashed once the province of ethics and morality is situated.

iii. On Ethics/Morality

Morality implies the sum total of the norms, mores and laws that form a people's foundation for action. Etymologically, the term, morality derives from the Latin, *more*, which means people's cultural traditions and values, and is the foundation for the rightness or wrongness of action. Morality portends values; and values are virtues. Thus, a value or virtue is an operative habit that is good. Good habits are formed from cherished interior dispositions not mere instincts. Values reflect inclinations and dispositions as "...the accessory quality that enables man to use his potencies or faculties correctly, with ease, promptness and pleasure" (Garrigou-Lagrange, 1965, xi). Public morality regulates the behavior and values of an individual and community to achieve social order, cohesion and solidarity; it is 'the total set of ethical-moral and legal-human rights, values, customs, 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. Public morality thus defines law, mores, norms and other aspects of community arrangements. There are public ethos which provides the cement of any human society, and the law, especially the criminal law, must regard it as a primary function to maintain this public morality (Peschke, 2004). In other words, law is an aspect and strengthener of wider moral values of a community. However, the perverted applicability of the social media today poses serious threat to public morality. What makes one action right and another wrong? Can such be universal? Answers to these vary.

For instance, ethical realism asserts that there are objective ethical facts that exist independently of anyone or society; that "ethical truths are true whether or not anyone says/thinks they are true".¹² Yet one must distinguish this from ethical absolutism – the view that there is a single moral standard which is applicable to all men, at all times, and in all circumstance, that what is right is absolutely indisputable and independent of all factors such as period and situation and place, no exception. But to say moral principles are universal is to agree that, though they allow some exceptions, all humanity has a moral consciousness. From the foregoing, ethical conflicts could arise. A single ethical system might provide some guideline for ordering principles and priorities; but a clash of such systems forecloses any such possibility. Thus the question and dilemma is: Shall we (Solomon and Greener, 1999) encourage ethical pluralism (the coexistence of several value systems)? The effect of this dilemma is particularly felt on normative ethics, values, rules, standards, or principles that should guide our decisions about what ought to be done (Singer, 1994, p.10). Deontological theories thrive to emphasis/assert that the rightness or goodness of an action is not determined solely by its end result or consequence. It requires that the independence of the obligation and right of the agent be unimpaired, governed by not hypothetical but categorical rules.

But the consequentialist or teleological theories emphasis that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by whether it produces or impedes the purpose of human action; actions are either right or wrong depending on their consequences; thus too is the utilitarian theory (Bentham, Mill and Sedgwick are classical advocates of this theory – concentration on results). 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). But must one wait until an unjust murder (for instance) is carried on before deciding its rightness or wrongfulness? How do we determine pleasurable, psychological status of moral agents? As I write this piece at this time of US elections, the air is replete with news of Russia hacking US/UK mails; it has already generated untold tension around the world, with devastating implication for future national elections—again, the seemingly boundless scope social media applicability is the catalyst.

iv. Findings and Discussion

Whether by ethical realism, consequentialist or deontological reasoning, contemporary social media for whatever reasoning cannot stand. First, what was the intention in creating an application with corruptive capacities? Granted that this may be a latent function, yet all the consequentialities of the social media discredit its discovery. Nor is the media objectively right; there abounds so much to indicate its absurdity. If one goes by Hume, then the basis of ethics is to be found in our emotions or, as he calls them, passions; then reason becomes, much less significant in ethics, and the parallels between our own ethics and that of non-human animals become correspondingly close (Singer, p. 7). The misuses of nascent social media indicate both those perspectives.

Now, in the first place, *chatting* downplays voice calls and texting and makes one's contact visible to the many unknown; it is thus addictive. In addition, the *Facebook* is a quick channel for falsehood and pornographic gallery; it allows for the many getting information not suitable for them—such leads to untold malaises such as assault and kidnapping. Financially, many systems especially devise power/batteries, often get damaged. Commitment to the applications causes distractions and addictiveness, especially on irrelevant or immoral discussions. In fact, one's video/photo could, and often, gets viral and into wrong hands; most often, this leads to cheap blackmailing. In all, popularized falsehood is inestimable; and secret recording for malicious purposes is commonplace. In fact, sometimes, the technologically configured pictures/videos are manipulated and re-circulated with (often) evil intent. Besides, the applications allow for the youth to engage in voice/video sexual interaction between infidel partners even right in the presence of their spouse, siblings, wards, and parents or even in the churches and student classrooms—plus the inestimable consequences. Regrettably, social media addiction (with recent development of the 5G and Tik-Tok and their touted capacity to manipulate man and nature) carries mind and physical bombs. Admitted that these infamies are not restricted to only the social media but to all other computer based communication outfits, it is noteworthy that the trajectory is unimaginable; and the condition is exacerbated and worsened, with improved technology as the catalyst.

Hence, one must note that the commitment to empirical success has led us quite unwillingly to treat people like things, once the legal arrangements have been made, so that one can now (on his own) produce teleological technology. Historically, man has always invented tools, more tools, and those helped him to cope with problems of advancing life. For better or for worse, the developments have led to great inventions

which have aided socio-cultural enhancement—especially in communication and health. The positive progress in science and technology are within measurable but summarized indices—the discoveries in space, medicine has ensured man's health and long-life aided by the electric tooth brush and signing air conditioners; aiding computers and robots. The movements between thousand miles are reduced by fast flying jets; television or telephone brings two people, each on the other side of the tropics, together. There is also the industrial impact—makes faster production and distribution. At least the traumatized idea of the world's vital citizens is that civilization has been globalized and has had worldwide spread. The centrifugal social forces have been conquered with technology on the dual basis of an overwhelming efficiency and an increasing standard of living.

But this whole technology seems irrational especially with its deficiency in coping with the obnoxious latent consequences: its productivity is destructive of the free development of human needs and faculties, and its peace maintained by the constant threat of war/fight: individuals, groups, and international. Hence Marcuse wrote:

*...in the medium of technology, culture, politics and socio-economic merge into an omnipresent system which up all other alternatives.
...technological rationality has become political rationality (1964:229).*

It is important to note that interaction is central to society. Therefore, communication, with all its attendant transmission, has thereby, tended to produce a world culture; the latest development in New York is visible in Calcutta within seconds. Accordingly, the developments in science and technology have social, economic, religious, ethical, and other implications for immorality.

Admittedly, social media is not a creation of Africa; it is imported product of a globalized world. The weakness of the African has been his none apprehension of the fact that in the maintenance of social order, peace and development in a state is comparable to the control or maintenance of balance in human metabolic/organic system. Take the health/medical condition of chronic hypertension, for instance. Diagnosis is done; drugs administered. Three possibilities are obtainable: First, there is the expectation that the health condition improves in response to the drugs administered; or second, the health condition does not improve, perhaps because the dosage was not enough to counter and ameliorate the nasty elements in the system, while the condition degenerates; or, finally, three, the administered drugs become counter-productive, the condition dramatically worsens, becomes irreversible and the patient dies—perhaps because of mal- or ill-administration/application of the drugs expressive of either the health practitioner's inabilities or the fakeness of some drug. Whichever of the second and third possibilities or options, it could have been the case that there was an initial error either in the making/generating of the drugs, or in the training and learned beliefs and knowledge by the practitioner; or in diagnosing the problem. Thus, whichever the cause, there obtains a condition that could be described as inefficacy in the drug administration.

In the light of the above illumination or analogy, it is possible to describe the state of affairs in a society which experiences the acme of inadequate embracement of wrong ideas, values/beliefs, or simply an emergent principle we shall call *mal-done* or *ill-administration/application* of those even good ideas, values/beliefs and other aspects of enculturation, in politics, religion, training and learning, science and technology, *et cetera*. It could simply be a misapplication of man's rational power misunderstanding and miscomprehension of the direction or essence of the universe; it could simply be act of evil or wickedness. Consequently and like the analogy of the drugs, three possibilities are obtainable: First, there is the expectation that the social condition improves in response to the ideas applied; or second, the social condition does not improve, perhaps because the principle was not suitable 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 condition expressive of disorder – perhaps because of mal- or ill-administration/application of the wrong ideas expressive of either the social worker's (be he a teacher, politician, administrator, religious pastor, etc.) Inabilities or the fakeness of some idea. Whatever the cause or excuse, the condition amounts to social malady or parody, in which case, it is some human contraction.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This work has attempted to espouse the nature and implications of social media. Concerns about the evil aspects of social media should reflect on the dangers the platform pose for our generation and humanity. We need to follow the history searching for the good alternative. Recall that Plato's chief critique against democracy was that it can't be best a political system which kills its acclaimed “best” human being ever to have lived; hence he set out to proffer an alternative. Even though his preference for the *philosopher king* as ruler has not found the light of day, yet Locke's modern advocacy for democracy, based on individual freedom and which has found and dominated the light of day for centuries, has not fared better. Or is the dictatorship encouraged by successive Marxist regimes more desirable? If a system which kills its best citizen is not good enough, another which produces its worst as its Head cannot be the ideal. The impact of the social media in the recent US elections is instructive: Trump embraced the platform (particularly the *Facebook* and *Twitter*) to disseminate falsehood based on emotional appeals to millions around the 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 misuse of freedom leading into unfreedom. If Americans can be so swayed and defrauded, then Africa and the Third World is defenseless. Thus the search for workable alternatives must be re-energized.

Social media is not African language. The invasion of social media on Africa is a reflection of African vulnerability; it has led to a finality of cultural stagnation and a paralysis in the dynamic of social production and engineering, and the heathenization of African belief systems, values, and morality, to the usurpation and atrophy of African

languages/perceptions; it is socially genocidal, and culturally annihilating. As against Tangua (1992), there is need for Africans to regret the imposition of colonial languages on the continent; it has negated the fact that language is an inevitable index of culture and identity, “the key to African development” (Prah, 1993). In fact, the number of native language speakers has dropped, thereby slowing down the development of those local languages; in some cases, the imposition has led to the near total extinction of indigenous languages; the contemporary milieu is worse for the role *art* play on our youth. This technological imperialism is perhaps worse than colonialism. Today, the best attitude to the language trap and the dilemma posed by the corollary of social media is “to embark on a conscious effort to rejuvenate *our* indigenous languages” (Uroh, 1994); such might begin by introducing same to school's curriculum. The transfer or adaptation of development practices and moral rectitude require linguistic vehicles which relate to the masses than the elites; mass media must be censored among the youth and masses with restrictive legal instruments. This requires that new ethical inputs are shaped and conceived in language and forms which are in harmony with the indigenous knowledge base and its internal natural logic. Introduced communication technology can only be adopted when in harmony with extant values and freed from the specific western cultural packaging—if ever they are to find a fertile and receptive grounds in African society. Even though the creative spirit is in itself a universal phenomenon, for it to respond to challenge, it needs to be rooted in familiar and native cultural system.

Finally, let it be said that the (Benin) Oba's observation and recommendation recorded in the first paragraph is not only an appreciation of a problem of decay in traditional values/morals, his attitude is a note of hope rather than despair. Besides his sue for reinforcement of traditional morals values, we want to reiterate the fact that the mass/social media is a formidable catalyst to moral degeneration. Consequently, the recommendation here, however, is that although the mass/social media has enhanced channels of communication, it's capacity should be whittled down, and its applicability should be censored and subjected to cultural suitability test, which is the only way to preserve cherished traditional core values/morality – which essence should be taught to the youthful user at some early/tender stage in his life.

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