

## Internet Impact on the Nigeria Youths Behavior

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### Abstract

Today, the Internet is a global phenomenon having instantaneous capability of providing to immense online amount of information relating education, sports, commerce, entertainment, and all walks of life. Using three theoretical perspectives germane to information and communication technology, this paper examines the positive and negative impacts the Internet presents to the behaviour of Nigerian youths; ranging from economic benefits derived from online business solutions and social networking, through detrimental results of cyber-crime, pornographic addiction to astonishingly declined craving for academic distinction in colleges and universities. The internet has become a unique mass medium with the ability to give members of society access to published data/information. It also lowers barriers to publication, increases access to what in the past would have remained secrets and makes communication more rapid and farther reaching than any other medium had done before its invention. Another major issue often raised in discourses relating to the internet is that of control and the absence of gate-keeping – the monitoring of disseminated information. In an atmosphere where information made available to the public are not censored, it may be argued that room may be created for some sort of state of anarchy in which the established ways of doing things are challenged and human behaviours begin to go beyond the reach of conventional control structures.

### Keywords:

Internet,  
Youths,  
Behaviours,  
Addiction and  
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## **Background to the Study**

In the present day, disseminating or collecting information has become the easiest of tasks with the help of the internet. We have a new world with its own laws and regulations, a community commonly called the online community. Since the internet and other media have been adopted and integrated into the daily lives of an increasing number of young adolescents in Western countries, scholars and commentators are debating the impact of these new media on the activities, social relationships, and worldviews of the younger generations. Controversies about whether technology shapes values, attitudes, and patterns of social behaviour are not new. In the recent past, the rapid expansion of television stimulated similar discussions of its cultural and social effects. In this essay, I will briefly describe the sources of the debate and its specific arguments regarding the role of the internet in youth life. Then, I will describe some important trends in youth activities, attitudes, and behaviours.

The literature on the internet and youth culture presents different views regarding the role of technology in society. Young people's social practices online and use of digital media have been conceptualized both as an opportunity and a threat to society. Discourse on youth digital practices has often focused on utopian visions of online spaces as egalitarian playgrounds for democracy, learning, and content creation, with great potential to enrich the minds of young people (e.g., Thomas & Brown, 2009; Prensky, (2001) or, conversely on shadow spaces in which predators lurk, behaviour is constantly surveilled, and deviant behaviour may flourish (e.g., Cavoukian, 2013; Flanagan, 2007). Gaining a more robust and nuanced understanding of young people's digital interactions and practices, and the social and design implications thereof, is a key objective within current research on networked youth.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this study is to sanitize immense online amount of information relating to education, sports, commerce, entertainment, and all walks of life.

## **Theoretical Framework**

It is clear that the Internet has manifested itself in multifarious folds. It has equally become crucial to initiate and sustain critical reflections on how the use of the Internet explains the diversities in the way people react as well as interact within their local environments. The fact that the Internet is dynamic, active, and ever expanding makes it difficult to provide a general approach that will reflect different sets of beliefs and perceptions. While trying to offer a conventional approach to facilitate a stand-alone knowledge that explains the impact that the Internet has brought upon education and culture in Nigerian youths, social scientists and various academic scholars have offered mixed pictures of collaborative theories built upon general concepts that are critical to equalize various perspectives, opinions and beliefs. Individual philosophical orientation often dictates how different people perceive the effects of the Internet (Kunnuji; 2014). Although some theories appear to be more convincing than others, no singular idea has completely accounted for the way Internet has affected youth behaviour.

In order to avoid oversimplification; work done in this paper has been built largely on three relevant information and communication technology theories which either lend credence and support or contest positions. They include: *Technological Determinism*, *Media Equation* and *Coordinated Management of Meaning Theories*. These theories are put forward to help understand how the Internet has impacted youths' innate or inculcated cultural values and behaviour in Nigeria.

### **Technological Determinism**

Technological determinism theory (also known as medium theory), a McLuhan theory, posit that Internet technology has in one way or another affected the lives of those who have come in contact with it (McLuhan, 1995). While it can be argued that some changes are more pronounced than others, technology has radically altered the way every individual perceives things. To a wider perspective, technology has not only changed people's lives, it has also transformed the way people feel and react to things within a society (Griffin, 2000). As sensational as some of these changes may be, it has drawn different sentiments from all and sundry; most people view technology as a principal initiator of cultural transformation. In McLuhan (1995) words, "Technological innovations result into cultural change i.e. human beings invent concepts which bring about innovations; these innovations ends up changing our lives, the way we reason and the way we do things. Thus, technology in some way shapes our cultural values. Information and communication technologies leave no aspect of the human life unaffected. Ranging from workplace to schools and from recreation to politics; technology has in one way or another shaped people's life". Going by McLuhan's assumption, it is obvious that the African community is in a midst of a cultural revolution and most people still find it difficult to accept that some things will never remain the same.

Examining Africa today vis-à-vis McLuhan's theory of technological determinism, a lot of things has changed. People who have access to the Internet and other communication media have adopted the western kind of life either directly or indirectly. With the Internet swiftly cutting across continents, it is definite that cultures would be transferred onto others; globalization through technology will continue to integrate the world into a single universal village where the Internet instils detribalization to humanity. This depicts that the expansion of Internet technology across the globe will continue to influence the lives of individuals within the African community; and it would extensively be reflective in overall Africa's culture, education and thought processes. Already in the modern era of incessant technological advancement, we are experiencing situation(s) where everyone is in touch everywhere, all at once, and in real-time.

### **Media Equation**

This theory simply put forward that the media is exactly the same as real life and it predicts why people respond instinctively and spontaneously to communication media as if it were human. Reeves and Nass (1996) who are proponents of this theory, claim that human beings react to the media (Internet) as real social actors. To these theorists, the media create basis for our shared understanding of the society. This theory further explains that the media constructs our reality in various ways. People tend to respond naturally to the media even though they believe it is not realistic to do so (Griffin, 2000). Various individuals have been

noticed to respond involuntarily to the media; reacting in such a way that suggests the media is alive. For example, some individuals would evaluate their success or failure primarily based on what information they read about and accrue on the Internet. A child who desires to be an artiste may be influenced by Michael Jackson's album he or she finds on the Internet, while another child aspiring to become a renowned politician may inadvertently start behaving like President Obama due to some political debates watched online. This clearly shows that the media is real and isn't just affecting people's sense of reality.

Akin to McLuhan's theory, Reeves and Nass agree that Internet technology has in some ways affected the human lives positively and vice versa. Some media platforms like the Internet, televisions (TVs) and other types of multimedia gadgets prompt some responses that human beings have developed over a long period of time (Griffin, 2000). For example, our initial reactions to cinema, and when watching live sports on TV are in line with the media equation theory. For the simple fact that we unwillingly express our emotions in response to the media portrays that the media is both active and real. According to these two theorists, the media has got a full and active presence in our virtual and real worlds thereby showing a tendency to affect lives and induce a change within the society as corroborated by the theory of technological determinism. If people react in reflex and real manner to media broadcast (media equation), then it can be argued that the influence of the Internet media can be consequential to African education and culture whether in an agreeable or obnoxious manner.

### **Coordinated Management of Meaning**

Remarkably developed by Vernon Cronen and Barnett Pearce in the 1970s, the coordinated management of meaning theory basically postulates that same messages on any Internet platform has the ability to create different impacts on different sets of people because of their different sets of backgrounds (Pearce, 1989). According to (Pearce and Pearce, 2000), "Communication Management of Meaning theory is a communication theory that has most often been used as an interpretive heuristic in interpersonal communication contexts". This theory does not undermine the assumptions of the previous theories elaborated above, it distinctively and explicitly underlines that the impact of Internet on various cultures differs depending on three fundamental courses of human interactions viz: coherence, coordination and mystery. For example, the same media message broadcasted in Ghana could have different impact on the people in South Africa due to discrepancies in most especially ethnicities or cultures, educational backgrounds, self-concept and religious beliefs. This theory is proposed to help understand how meanings, ideas and philosophies are coordinated as well as managed in the virtual space. In this manner, it can be deduced that the way people perceive the world (including information read and garnered from the Internet) depends entirely on their own vibration i.e. their background, beliefs, education, ethos and way of life.

While technological determinism theory posits that the Internet has changed people, the media equation theory on the other hand holds the view that the media (Internet) is exactly the same as real life; and coordinated management of meaning theory in its own notion, continuously preaches that the same Internet messages could be understood differently in different places depending on culture and level of enlightenment. To summarize, these

theories are not designed to evaluate and tell which gives accurate overview of the crux of the matter in this writing; however, they will help provide better interpretation and proffer ideal approach in understanding different positions that would be elaborated in subsequent sections of this paper.

### **Negative Impacts of Internets on Youths**

**Sexual Solicitation/Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Content:** There is a significant base of existing literature exploring sexual harassment or unwanted sexual solicitation of minors by adults and other youth. Behaviours constituting sexual harassment include requests for sexual contact, sexual talk, sending or soliciting sexual photographs, or the disclosure of unwanted sexual information. Unwanted or accidental exposure to sexual content refers to any circumstance in which youth are confronted with suggestive content or sexual imagery/videos while surfing the web for non-sexual content. This can occur during web searches, pop-up ads, email scams, or when youth unwittingly open problematic links in emails or instant messages (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell; 2007).

### **Cyber-Crime, Hacking and Internet Fraud**

The terms cyber-crime, hacking and Internet fraud are sometimes used interchangeably. Quite a lot has been written, analysed and deliberated by individuals, societies and governments about cyber-crime. Excerpts from the Council of Europe Convention on Cyber-crime (2001) defined cyber-crime as any criminal offence committed against or with the aid of a computer network in such a manner that confidentiality, integrity and availability of data are breached. In other words, the use of a computer is a prerequisite for cyber-crime. From a logical perspective, it is arguable that when there is no means for an attacker to gain unauthorized access into a system (cash in on vulnerability), hacking or cyber-crime seems unfeasible and risk of damage is nearly, if not totally eliminated.

Mohammad M. K. et al (2012) opined that there is no such nation in the world immune to Internet fraud owing to the modern-day advancement in technology. There has never been a greater need for financial security and control in online business activities than currently because of the rapid increase in Internet fraud. The significant development in real time transactions through Internet technology has indeed led to transformation in all aspects of life. It has brought about striking positive and negative changes not only to the western world, but also to the striving economy of developing nations such as Nigeria. While constantly increasing the standard of life, making transactions almost painless and continually confirming the progression in technology, the Internet has negatively impacted on the vulnerable aspects of the African societies.

**Internet Addiction:** Excessive Internet use is emerging as one of the more negative aspects of young people's online activities. In the literature, such extreme use is often synonymous with the terms 'compulsive Internet use', 'problematic Internet use', 'pathological Internet use', 'Internet dependence', 'computer addiction' and 'net addiction'. Internet addiction, the term we use here, has been defined as the use of the Internet to escape from negative feelings, continued use of the Internet despite the desire to stop, experience of unpleasant emotions when Internet use is impossible, thinking about the Internet constantly, and the

experience of any other conflicts or self-conflicts due to Internet use (van den Eijnden, Meerkerk, Vermulst, et al; 2008).

**Online Harassments:** Online harassment is defined as 'threats or other offensive behaviour (not sexual solicitation) sent online to the youth or posted online about the youth for others to see (Ybarra, Mitchell; 2008). One of the more common forms of harassment among youth is that of cyber bullying, which is defined as 'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text' Patchin, Hinduja; 2006). It is often perceived as the online version of offline bullying, or 'traditional bullying', which is characterized as the 'aggressive intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself.

### **Positive Impact of Internet on Youths**

**Enhancement in Academic Performance:** Despite the risks, the Internet can also be a positive tool for student learning as well as youth empowerment and well being. There is evidence that computer and Internet use improves test scores (Wainer, Dwyer, Dutra, et al; 2008; Biesinger, Crippen; 2008), history chronology learning, and motivation to learn (Rau, Gao, Wu; 2008). Although promising, the benefits are not without limits.

**Youth Empowerment:** There is also evidence that the Internet may help to empower youth, particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances. Barak and Sadovsky (2008) found that hearing-impaired youth took advantage of the heavily visual medium of the Internet to communicate. Doing so also had a positive effect on their well being. A recent review concluded that adolescents are primarily using the Internet to reinforce offline relationships (Subrahmanyam, and Greenfield; 2008); adolescents also seem to use online forums such as homepages and blogs to gain positive feelings of mastery and competence.

### **Conclusion**

For youth, the Internet presents a number of risks along with a multitude of opportunities. The paper found that some of the online risks facing youth are addiction, exposure to inappropriate material, cyber bullying and sexual solicitation. Despite these risks, the paper also suggests that the Internet can be beneficial for youth. It provides a vehicle to promote cognitive, social, and physical development. Overall, research suggests that specific and targeted efforts may be needed to counter online risks in order for youth to benefit from the many opportunities offered by the Internet.

### **Recommendations**

As technology continues to expand access to the Internet, use among teens is inevitable. Consequently, rather than focusing on censorship of teen use; we must look for strategies to encourage safer and more positive operation of this complex system. Some potential strategies include:

1. A federal law, The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires websites to explain their privacy policies on the site and obtain parental consent before collecting or using a minor's personal information, such as a name, address, phone number, or social security number. The law also



- prohibits a site from requiring youth to provide more personal information than necessary to play a game or contest.
2. Parents and educators can place Internet filters that inhibit access to inappropriate sites such as pornographic sites.  
Adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health information is minimally affected by pornography-blocking software. For example, only 5% of online health information was filtered out by pornography-blocking software when installed at moderate settings while blocking 90% of pornographic content.
  3. Many sites use "cookies," devices that track specific information about the user, such as name, email address, and shopping preferences. Cookies can be disabled. Ask your Internet service provider for more information.
  4. Parents and educators can educate themselves about the Internet.
  5. Parents should not be afraid to monitor their teen's use of the Internet. Tracking programs can be purchased to access previously visited sites.
  6. Keep the computer in a common area, not in individual bedrooms, where you can watch and monitor your teen.
  7. Parents should become involved in their teens Internet life. Perhaps acquire a screen name and chat with their teen online. This will allow parents to be on the same page as their teens.
  8. A number of schools have incorporated media literacy into their curriculum in order to educate kids about the risks and benefits of Internet use. These programs will often show kids how to identify deceiving information and to never fully trust any non-accredited website.

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