

Appraisal of the Influence of Social Media Usage on Interpersonal Relationship Among Family Members in South-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Social media have become the highest activity on the internet. With the invention of social media in the 20th century, it is believed that numerous changes had occurred in the way human beings interact. For many years now, the negative effects of social media and how social media is changing family relationships have gained much attention among scholars and research groups. This research therefore, examined the influence of the social media usage on interpersonal relationship among family members in the South East of Nigeria using the survey method. A representative sample of 384 respondents was purposively drawn from the population of study. Findings revealed that family engrossment in social media activities decreases show of affection amongst members, the majority of the respondents believed that excessive engagement in social media greatly influenced the amount of time they spent together with family members. The study therefore recommended among others that, families should evolve templates to regulate social media use. In that regards, families should create family time when use of social media would be restricted.

Keywords: Appraisal, Influence, Social Media, Interpersonal Relationship, Family Members

1. Introduction

Ever since humans started living together in groups, they have devised methods of satisfying their needs for interaction by creating ways of communication, ranging from the use of primitive language, to the use of advanced technologies like computer and mobile devices. The essence we may argue is to ensure social cohesion among their respective groups. Throughout history, developments in technology and communication have gone hand-in-hand, and the latest technological developments such as the internet have resulted in the advancement of the science of communication to a new

Level. The process of human communication has evolved over the years, with many path-breaking inventions and discoveries heralding revolutions.

Social media which are a form of electronic communication have become the highest activity on the internet. They refer to social networking websites developed to specifically help people share their views and stay in touch with their friends, relatives and well-wishers. Social media are also internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multi-media mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio (Bruce & Douglas, 2008). The social part of social media is where it departs from traditional media and incorporates an aspect of social interaction (Murthy, 2012).

According to Dijck and Pollell, (2013), things such as;

Talking with friends, exchanging gossip, showing holiday pictures, checking on a friend's well-being or watching a neighbour's home video were once casual acts shared only with selected individuals. Now, with the major change, known as social media, these casual acts are now released into public domain far-reaching with long lasting effects.

With the advent of social media in the 20th century, it is believed that numerous changes had occurred in the way we as humans interact. In fact, social media is deemed to be altering the way things are done in the society. One of such things is the creation and maintenance of relationships. Statista (2021) points out that 59.3% of the world population use social networking sites to socialize. This is against the backdrop of a 2021 report released by DATA REPORTAL (2021) which shows that the number of social media users in Nigeria increased by 6.0 million (22%) between 2020 and 2021, as at January 2021, there were 33.00 million social media users in Nigeria. Also, the Ngozi Okonjo Iweala Polls (NOIPOIIS) in its 2019 poll report on social media use, states that out of 61% of adult Nigerians who access the internet, 95% say they use the internet for social media.

According to Haruna and Danladi (2017), the advent of social media brought about a change in our cultural norms because they connect people instantly from distant lands and serve as platforms to establish new relationships. Social media create artificial or virtual communities of people, thus, people can make "friend" and have followers" on facebook, twitter and other social media sites. In addition, there are actual communities of people interested in art, travel and other indulgences that people involve themselves in various social media sites (Okorie and Tunji, 2011).

With social media usage skyrocketing, this new form of technology opens up a new channel of tightly woven interactivity with individuals for the first time, forever changing the way the world population communicate, exchange its messages and ultimately form relationships (Cooper, 2013). The kind of community building across Internet groups, demographics and nationalities have transformed the way we connect with strangers, loved ones, friends and colleagues (Asemah & Edogoh, 2013).

The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, conducted a study in 2008 and found that email, cell phones and texting helped families compensate for the increased stress of modern life by allowing them to communicate with family members when apart. However, this can equally deny family members of attention, communication, and a feeling of safety within the family circle. For over a decade now, the negative effects of social media and how social media is changing family relationships have gained much attention among scholars and research groups. According to ProCon

(2015) which reported that the study conducted by the Center for the Digital Future at the USC Annenberg School study found that the percentage of people reporting less face-to-face time with family in their homes rose from 8% in 2000 to 34% in 2011. The study equally revealed that social media causes people to spend less time interacting face-to-face. In the study, 32% of the respondents reported using social media or texting during meals. 47% of the respondents within the age bracket of 18-34 years engage in using social media instead of talking with family and friends, while 10% of the respondents, younger than 25 years old respond to social media and text messages during sex.

The social media users are so glued to the various social media platforms that they are inseparable from their cell phones, laptop and other devices. There is no again saying that people who are always active on social media are not available mentally for the family. The available studies on the influence of social media on interpersonal communication and relationship are in agreement that social media do have a sort of influence but there is discord on the nature of influence (Hughes, Hans, 2017, Brown & Dugid, 2000). The pertinent question is: have these inventions been able to assist humans in achieving social cohesion within their respective groups? Or have humans done the opposite by default in their attempts to achieve their goals? (Berger, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

With the advent of social media and its ability to connect people and offer them platforms for communicating with each other anywhere in the world making socializing possible, attention of scholars have been drawn to the possible influence of this technology on interpersonal relationship in the family. According to Turnbull (2016), families ideally depend on quality interpersonal communication and relationship to sustain cohesion.

Several research efforts point to the possibility of social media having negative influence on family interpersonal relationship, this they say emanated from its ability to personalize communication (O’Keeffe & Clarke – Pearson, 2011; Rideout, Foehr & Robert, 2010; Hughes & Hans, 2017).

Amidst this concern of possible negative social media influence on family interpersonal relationship, the discourses and narratives emanating from other scholars across the globe seem to be polarized as there is yet to exist concrete research evidence establishing actual negative social media influence on family interpersonal relationship (Bala, 2015; McQail, 2006; Bachen, 2004; Avery and baker, 2000). It is crucial to point out that these research efforts are mainly of western world origin, thus reflecting the family structure, orientation, values and organization of that climes.

In Nigeria, the subject (social media influence on interpersonal relationship among family members) is seemingly underexplored. With this in mind, the obvious question is: What is the nature of influence social media usage has on interpersonal relationship among family members in South-East Nigeria? All these formed the premise upon which this study was conceived in the first instance. Hence, this study investigates the influence of social media usage on interpersonal relationship among family members in South-East Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the nature of influence social media usage by family members in the South-East Nigeria has on affective relationship among them.

2. Determine the extent to which the preference for social media influenced the amount of time family members in South-East Nigeria spent together
3. Ascertain how social media usage by family members in South-East Nigeria influenced their communication patterns.

Literature Review

Ideally, the concept of family invokes that sense of cohesion and bond especially among human elements. Such state of being is fundamentally sustained through communication. Rightly, the family is seen as the epicenter of socialization and nucleus of the society (Vanier Institute of the family, 2019). Environmental peculiarities might affect the structure and organization of families, but affinity borne out of relatedness or commonality of interest remains the universal denominator. The overriding factor in the concept of family is that human elements that constitute the family naturally interact and influence each other's behaviours in a more personal manner than with others outside the family group (Ekong, 1988; Rotimi, 2005). The interaction though they occur in a variety of ways, has communication at the centre that either sustain family bond or causes disunity, in a more serious instances, disintegration of family ties. Perhaps, this could account for the worry in recent times amongst scholars concerning the state of family relationships and the possible effect of modern communication technologies in enthroning family collectivism rather than individualism.

Cheal (2014) stresses that modern society has given rise to a complexity and diversity of personal relationships, which has lead to an increased questioning about the future of family structures. According to Scott (2015) there has been a decline in "traditional nuclear family households as people have become more individualistic and families are spending less time together (Turtiainen, Sakari & Ossi, 2007). Trying to bring clarity to, and better understanding of family structure, interaction and communication, Ritchie and Fitz Patrick (1994), posit that family communication pattern has two fundamental dimensions, they are conversation orientation and conformity orientation. They argue that in a conversation orientation family, family members freely interact with each other and discuss a substantial range of topics. Conformity orientation family communication pattern, on the other hand, is characterized by interactions that emphasize a uniformity of belief, attitude and values. Knowledge on family communication patterns will assist in understanding how families interact and relate with each other.

Based on the foregoing, Strong, Vault, Said, & Raymond (1983) posit, 'Family is the foundation upon which the society is build...such that what happens within the family structure may have ripple effect on the society as a whole. The family introduces the child to values of cooperation and reciprocity and to expectations of social interaction (Chukwu, 2015). The trend that exists is tenable in the larger society.

The family in Nigerian context is an inviolable institution, nurtured and protected as the only means of sustaining the human lineage. In Igbo society, South East Nigeria, which is the area of this study, the family is sacrosanct; expressed in such concepts as 'Ama echina' – 'May my home never go into extinction' – and 'Aham efuna' – 'May my name never get lost'. These two beliefs are the sole motivating factors behind the reasons 'pre-modern' parents in Igboland married for their children (especially male children) at a very early age; with deep rooted interest in child bearing (especially male child) and rearing in marriage.

The Social Media in Perspective

The term social media refers to websites that allow users to connect to one another based on shared interest, activities or characteristics (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). Tesorero (2013) sees social media as a phenomenon that has recently taken over the web, allowing more connectivity and interaction between web users and it encourages contributions and feedback from anyone who is a member of the virtual community. These authors views emphasize the importance of websites as connective route to social media usage, suggesting further that each social media site serves varied functions of socialization for users. For example, Friendster was launched in 2002 and was dubbed “circle of friends” and the site promotes the idea that a rich online community can open relationship between people that could be associated with common bonds with different ways to discover those bonds. MySpace came in 2003 with predominantly young population to build up social connections and it satisfies social entertainment drives through provision of music, movie, and games. LinkedIn was launched in 2003 for professionals to showcase their skills and connect to people or groups with professional orientation. Facebook was launched in 2004, it was initially a campus- oriented sites for students but became a public online community for building social connections and sharing of information among people in 2006. Blog came in 1994 and was initially known as weblog and in 2002 had grown into a network of websites for blogging activities on the internet, primarily for people to share opinions and information on different social issues. Twitter was launched in 2006, as a micro-blogging site which enables people to communicate in 140 characters (Kaplan & Heinlein 2010; Chanolmstel, Cho & Lee, 2013; Bennett, 2014). All of these sites have become online communities for the advancement of socialization in the virtual world. Tesorero (2013) argues that different forms of social media provide platform for socialization without restrictive geographical and cultural differences.

Social Networking Activities, Communication and Relationship

Real life interaction is and has always been serving a crucial step in developing relationships. With later inventions and innovation of information age, where people can conveniently access and exchange information online for free, the communication process has transformed. With the change of communication trend, society seems to require less real life interactions with others. Mobile devices have become the medium and communication channel between people and knowledge/entertainment. Through computers and mobile devices, society shifted from face-to-face interactions with little social networking to social networking activities with little face- to- face interactions.

Interpersonal communication is both spoken and written words along with nonverbal cues to develop and maintain relationship with friends and family. Although online interactions have many benefits, scholars are saying, as the learning of relational skills continues, people who rely on online relationships are losing the ability to interact with others in real life. The ability to talk or communicate face to face is being eroded. The inability to effectively communicate may harm the interpersonal communication skills of young adults. This can potentially impact family relationships, socialization, school performance, and employment. Scholars are raising concerns on the negative effects of Internet among the younger generations which includes potential risk to their safety, well-being, and skill development (Drussel, 2012). Moreover, Selfout, Branje, Delsing ter Bogt and Meeuslescents (2009) report that excessive computer use among adolescents resulted in low friendship quality and adolescents are at higher risk of depression and social anxiety due to the limitation in exploration of one’s real life environment and this affects adolescent’s relationship development. Social networking sites can be used to maintain and develop relationships that already exist; virtual world allows

individuals to interact with others, both those they are familiar with and those they are not familiar with. Social networking site like Facebook allows users to connect with other individuals or groups virtually as if they were meeting face to face (Giffords, 2016). Most individuals especially adolescents consider their online relationships to be very real as relationships in their real lives, which can be long-term, trusting and very meaningful (Mishna, Mcluckie & Saini, 2017). Because of the attached meaning and emotion to these virtual relationships, the nature of human interaction in the future becomes very unpredictable.

Most scholars agree that excessive use of Internet and social network sites may limit proper interpersonal communication skill development (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2015). When interpersonal communication skills decline, conflict resolution and problem solving skills would equally be in decline. Chung and Asher (1996) indicate that responses to hypothetical conflict situations are similar to responses observed in real life experiences. The increase in adolescence reliance on technology for communication and the decline of face-to-face interaction will result in decreased ability to handle real-life conflicts. Adolescents that have close online relationship, were prone to be frightful, were often in significant trouble, and they lack the courage to reach out to their parents or to other adults (Woody, 2001; Bastian & Taylor, 1991; Opatow, 1989). The ineffective problem solving skills can jeopardize safety and lead to series of violent outcome.

The result of the study published by American psychologists Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Klesker, Mukophadhyay and Scherlis in 1998 was one of the earliest researches to examine the relationship between Internet use and social involvement and psychological well-being. The study conducted in America, sampled ninety-three families, consisting of 256 people, in their first twelve to eighteen months of being online. Results were found to reveal that increased Internet use leads to decrease in social involvement, feeling of loneliness, and increase in depressive symptoms. Overall, it was found that the higher the internet use, the less communication among family members (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Klesker, Mukophadhyay & Scherlis, 1998).

Pediatrics journal in 2010 warns of teens that excessively spend time on Facebook, that they may suffer from Facebook Depression Syndrome. Scholars from American Academy of Pediatrics argue that for most children being rejected on Facebook can be more harmful than being ignored by their actual friends and this can lead to mental illness and possible suicide. Study led by Jocinne Davilla at Stony Brook University in 2010 found that texting, email and social networking sites can negatively impact teens to obsess over certain issues rather than solving conflicts. One of the important findings, they stress, is that there are people who are at a higher risk to the negative interactions in social networking and are consequently feeling depressed or sad afterwards (Petrillo, 2011). Contributing to the discussion, Turnbull (2011) said in 2010, that Generation Y (generation Y refers to those born between 1980 to 2000) see face-to-face communication as an ideal way of communication, but changes in today's life style, the study stresses, made effective face-to-face communication less possible. However, the finding shows that generation Y likes to communicate through texting and thus miss out on quality and effective conversation as involvement in online activities among other factors lead to lack of non-verbal cues that should eventuate in clarity and meaning. According to Przybylski and Weinstein (2014), research carried out by Essex institute in London in 2013, shows that discussing personal topics with partners who were being distracted by their use of smart phone, might put their relationship in jeopardy. Personal revelation makes one vulnerable, speaker would feel compromised if listener is being distracted by the smart phone, this may inhibit relationship formation by reducing

individual engagement and attention for their partners, thus equally discourages partners perception that any self-disclosure had been met with care and empathy.

Social Medias Role in Shaping Family Communication

Social media usage does influence the type of interaction methods people adopt in their various environments. It is possible to communicate and resolve conflicts through social media usage in today's world. In the past, these were responsibilities that were conducted through face-to-face interaction and communication. Face-to-face interaction is characterized as a verbal social exchange of knowledge or information that occurs between two or more people (Nugent, 2013). Such exchange would be people talking in a verbal communication. Without face-to-face interaction, there is a possibility of valuable non-verbal communication cues going undetected or simply being disregarded, which may cause misunderstanding during communication. According to the online version of the Collins English Dictionary (2017), non-verbal communication cues involve variables such as the expressions on the face, gestures, a body's stance, or the tone of voice being used and this aid in indicating how a person feels about something short of using words. Much of the education on non-verbal communication is learned in home environments, from relatives or other parties, with significant face-to-face interactions which if effective, would impact positively on the nurturing process of young family members.

The home is an important factor in the learning of social and cultural values for families. The role of the computer and the Internet within the home can have a great influence on the intellectual development of children and adolescents. This can also prepare them for a role in life in which technology plays an important contribution.

Elisa (2009) wrote in an investigation regarding family socialization strategies, that the traditional evening of sitting around the dinner table as a family and telling stories, that in the past contributed to the forming of common bond and healthy family relationships, are no longer what it used to be, this situation in the main, could be attributed to recourse to technology mediated activities in the home. Children are known to need adult role models in the area of character formation since they learn through imitation and emulation. Children might have character deficiency in predominantly technology mediated family. Supporting the above stated view, Arizona State University Professor, Elsenberg Vallenge argues that Children will model their behavior after those they frequently observe and encounter through adults. Honesty and lying are character traits commonly influenced by parents or adults (Moore, 2015).

In a study by Kazeem in 2019, on the trends of social media in Nigeria, it was revealed that Facebook is the most dominant site in terms of active users, noting that 16 million people are on the platform, serving as a route to connect and construct relationships with others. As the researcher explains, 7.2 million people in Nigeria visit Facebook each day, 97% of that access the social media site on their mobile devices. Furthermore, the findings from the No polis (2019) survey on the use of social media for online dating in Nigeria capture Facebook as the most preferred social media site to respondents and that those between the age of 18 – 25 years are more prone to Facebook usage. Gender differences were apparent with female 93% more likely than the male 89% to use Facebook. A recent study by Statista (2021) showed that at the third quarter of 2020, WhatsApp was the most popular social media platform in Nigeria. The platform was used by 93% of internet users aged 16 to 64 years. Facebook and Youtube followed, being used respectively by 86% and 82% of the individuals with access to the internet. In 2020, the number of social media users in Nigeria reached roughly 28 million.

Okafor and Okoye, (2014) note from their 2014 study on social media use and real-life social relationships, that majority of the respondents surveyed at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, exploited online communities to improve their sociability through connecting with old friends and acquaintances, interacting easily regardless of distance. The authors referred to social interaction to involve two or more people creatively shaping their reality through online social interaction. The above discourse provides insight into how social media is engaged in today's Nigeria and the present study aims to go deeper by exploring how social media influences sociability among family members in South -East Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Family Communication Pattern Theory

Family communication pattern theory was propounded by David Ritchie and Anna Fitz Patrick in 1994. The theory stated that people's belief about family interrelationship vary to the extent to which family communication is perceived as open or as restricted. According to the theory, the two fundamental dimensions that both distinguish how families communicate and that have been associated with various functional consequences for families are conversation orientation and conformity orientation (Fitz Patrick & Ritchie 1994; Ritchie & Fitz Patrick, 1990). The first fundamental dimension of family communication is conversation orientation. It is defined as the degree to which families create a climate in which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interactions about a wide array of topics. Under this dimension, family members freely, frequently, and spontaneously interact with each other, spend large amount of time in interactions, and discuss a substantial range of topics. That is, these families spend a lot of time talking to each other and family members share their individual activities, thoughts, and feelings with each other. The other dimension of family communication is conformity orientation. Conformity orientation refers to the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values and beliefs. This dimension is characterized by interactions that emphasize a uniformity of beliefs and attitudes. Family interactions here typically focus on conformity, conflict avoidance, and the interdependence of family members. In intergenerational exchanges, communication in these families reflects obedience to parents and to other adults. This study largely drew from the postulations of this theory on the ground that it will form the framework used in investigating how family communication patterns (communication orientation and conformity orientation) shape family members attitude and behaviour towards issues, in this context, social media use and its influence. It would be known through the theory, if individuals from a conversation orientation family, who have a background of unrestrained interactions wouldn't depend on social media for interaction satisfaction. It would equally be known through the theory if individuals from conformity orientation family, who have a background of curtailed and restrained interactions, would fall under the influence of social media in their bids to get interaction satisfaction.

Technological Determinism Theory

This theory is associated with the work of technological determinists, Marshall McLuhan in 1962. The theory posits that media technologies shape how we as individuals in a society think, feel, act, and how society operates as we move from one technological age to another. The theory argues that changes in communication modes largely determine the course of history. It draws attention to the strength of communication technologies in fostering human interactions.

The theory regards the wider dimension of information craze in the society as a direct result of the information explosion fostered by information and communication technologies. It believes that the

social, historical, economic, and cultural changes occurring in human society today could be linked to the invention and development of new technologies.

However, Izuogu and Nwachukwu (2013), note that the theory of technological determinism attracted criticisms. For examples, Green (2002) was of the opinion that McLuhan's ideas should be discountenanced, dismissing it as one of the "myths" of technology and the old way of looking at things. However, it could be argued that McLuhan's ideas (technological determinism) has found greater expression in contemporary society more than ever before.

There is no doubt that McLuhan's technological determinism theory is seminal and most congruent in understanding cutting-edge technology like social media and how it affects users behaviours. This theory is appropriate for the study because it will help us to understand how social media affects user's behaviour in a family setting.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research method in gathering data. The researchers considered the method appropriate for the study because we use survey research to study a group of people, like those using social media as a means or method of facilitating interpersonal relationship. Since we are studying a large population, survey becomes ideal. The population of the study is all the residents of the five states of South-East Nigeria which is 23,697,324. A representative sample of 384 was drawn using online sample size calculator postulated by Wimmer and Dominick (2013) with confidence level of 95% and confidence interval or error margin of 5%. The purposive sampling technique was used to select two communities from each of the 15 local government areas.. In all, 30 communities selected.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Question One: What is the nature of influence Social Media indulgence by families in South East Nigeria has on affective relationship among them?

S/N	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1	Engagement in social media activities while having meals	198	50.89974	50.89974	72.2365
2	Couldn't keep off social media during conversation with family members	108	27.7635	27.7635	100
3	Sometimes engaged in social media activities during conversation with family members	83	21.33676	21.33676	21.33674
4	Can't say	0	00.0	00.0	00.0
Total		389	100	100	

The information above shows responses on influence Social Media indulgence by families in South East Nigeria has on affective relationship among them. The finding indicates that out of 389 respondents, 50.90% said that they engaged in social media activities while having family meals,

27.76% said they couldn't keep off social media during conversation with family members, while 21.34% said they sometimes engaged in social media activities during conversation with family members. It shows that majority engaged in social media activities while having family meals.

Question Two: To what extent has the preference for social media influenced the amount of time family members in South-East Nigeria spent together?

S/N	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1	To a great extent	183	47.0437	47.0437	47.0437
2	Some extent	164	42.15938	42.15938	89.20308
3	To no extent	2	0.514139	0.514139	89.71722
4	Low extent	40	10.28278	10.28278	100
5	Can't say	0	00.0	00.0	00.0
Total		389	100	100	

Data presented on the table above revealed the extent to which the preference for social media by family members in South-East Nigeria influenced amount of time they spent together. The data showed that 183 respondents or 47.04% said they preferred social media indulgence over interaction with family members to a great extent, 42.16% (164) of the respondents said they would rather interact with family members than indulgence in social media activities to some extent, 2 (0.51%) respondents said they wouldn't prefer any and would rather be on their own, 10.28% (40) of the respondents said the preference for social media influenced the amount of time they spent with family members to low extent while non was undecided. This means that the majority of the respondents believed that excessive engagement in social media greatly influenced the amount of time they spent together with family members.

Question Three: How has social media indulgence by families in the South East Nigeria influenced family communication pattern?

S/N	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1	Felt more free in face to face conversation with family members than in social media conversation	116	29.82005	29.82005	29.82005
2	Felt more free in social media conversation than in face to face conversation with family members	149	38.30334	38.30334	38.30334
3	The topic will determine the feelings on both face to face conversation with family members and on social media conversation	76	19.53727	19.53727	87.66067

4	Can't say	48	12.33933	12.33933	100
Total		389	100	100	

The table above sought to establish the attitude of respondents towards face-to-face conversation with family members and towards social media conversation. The result showed that the majority of the respondents 38.30% especially those who reside in urban center felt more free in social media conversation than in face to face conversation with family members, while 29.82% felt more free in face to face conversation with family members than in social media conversation, on the other hand 19.53% indicated that the topic will determine their feelings on both face to face conversation with family members and on social media conversation, 12.33% were undecided. From the data, it is obvious that majority of the respondents felt more free in social media conversation than in face to face conversation with family members.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question sought to find out the nature of influence Social Media indulgence by families in South East Nigeria has on affective relationship among them. Findings revealed that majority of the sampled respondents engaged in social media activities while having family meals. The finding made under this research question is supported by a similar finding by Mahmoud and Ahmedshafik in 2020. According to them, high social media usage by parents reduces interest in the children's wellbeing. The finding is equally supported by the finding of a study conducted by Norah in 2015. It was concluded that family engrossment in social media activities decreases show of affection amongst members.

The second research question aimed at identifying the extent to which preference for social media influenced the amount of time family members in South-East Nigeria spent together. Finding showed that the majority of the respondents believed that excessive engagement in social media greatly influenced the amount of time they spent together with family members. This result is similar to that of Unai (2018). According to Unai (2018), preference for social media activities limits quality time individuals spend together as a family.

The third research question sought to assess how social media indulgence by families in the South East Nigeria has influenced family communication pattern. Finding revealed that majority of the respondents felt more free in social media conversation than in face - to - face conversation with family members.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study focused on investigating the influence of social media usage on interpersonal relationship among family members in South-East Nigeria. The study therefore, concludes that the influence social media has on family interpersonal relationship is strong and negative,. Also, the study concludes that the South East residents (majority in the urban centres) preferred social media indulgence to family interaction and that most families in the South East Nigeria who live in the urban centres have social media addiction problem. The study therefore recommended that families should evolve templates to regulate social media use. In that regards, families should create family time when use of social media would be restricted. This regulation should be in the light of the fact that most family members' businesses are social media based, so they might be more disposed to social media use than to family

interactions most times. In line with the above stated, families should incorporate social media into family communication, this they can do by creating family social media group platforms for continuation of family interaction, especially when members are not together.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts to declare.

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