'A Review of Youth's Use of Mobile Telephony and Its Role in The Deconstruction of Family Communication'

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Abstract- The mobile telephony has gained momentum and is one of the defining communication technologies of the time. This paper interrogates the adoption of mobile telephony from varied scholars' perspectives. The insights are from the youth's uses of this communication technology while looking at how this use has impacted on family communication. The mobile phone is seen to have structured certain interaction behaviors in the youth among them a decreased desire for the face to face interaction. This was observed from the youth's continued display of addiction to social media. One of the important observations is that that uses of mobile phones to a great extent have altered the way families interact and have generated certain negative interactive behaviors. Nonetheless, this paper does not demonize mobile telephony but implores for appropriate usage of the communication technology.

Index Terms- Youth, Mobile Youth Culture, Family Communication, Parental Figures.

I. INTRODUCTION

The mobile telephony subscriptions run into billions worldwide according to the International Telecommunication Union (2018). The proliferation and access of the mobile phone in the society as informed by Rice, Haynes, Royce and Thompson (2016) indicates a very high adoption rate of the technology among the youth. The youth are documented to have used the mobile phones to structure their social developments among their peers at the expense of their family domestic ties. Yu, Anaya, Miao, Lehto, and Wong (2017) state that even under the watchful eye of the youth's parents, the youth could communicate to one another with a lot of ease. Aishwarya and Vinod (2017) reckoned that the youth had designed communication forms and patterns that distinguished the peer from the parents. The youth had given unique attention to their social networks, clearly demarcating insiders from outsiders. Aishwarya and Vinod (2017) lament over the present generation's dependence on online communication that has made that generation lose the ability for face to face communication.

Since mobile telephony is a reality, it could be argued that this technology could disintegrate or strengthen families as units of social organizations. However, this would largely depend on how one perceived and interpreted the interactions and functionality of mobile telephony.

1.2   Background to the Review

This review was motivated by the many societal trends especially a broadcast feature on 'Youth Pornography' in Kenya on the national Kenya Television Network (KTN) and the Citizen Television of the Royal Media Services (Kenya) on the 12th of April 2018. The feature had demonstrated how the youth willingly exchanged nude photos through their mobile phones. It further exposed how the youth were misusing the social media through their phones which shocked many parents after seeing the nude 'selfies' or photos of their youthful children. It was clear that parents hardly had any idea what their youth were doing with their phones in the confines of the youth's privacy.

Other scholars like Yu, Anaya, Miao, Lehto, and Wong (2017) also lamented about the disruptiveness of the communication technology on family quality time. Even when family members were together, some members regularly continued to use their mobile phones at the expense of the traditional bonding accorded to regular conversations. This negative trait as Drago (2015) observed was seen to hamper quality face to face interactions. Nonetheless, from the literature review provided in this paper, there are perceptions that embracing this communication technology has contributed to negative social consequences, among them rising tension within the family.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   Relevance of Symbolic Interactionism Theory

This review subjected the use of Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism Theory that interrogated the process of human interaction. Blumer (1934) states as humans interacted, they engaged in the formation of 'meanings' through group life and conduct. Individuals formed human groups through 'action' and from it 'acted' towards the interaction process. According to Joo and Teng (2017) the youth took advantage of this technology to form virtual societies or communities where they freely interacted. It was through these interactions that common symbols of meanings were derived and social relations resulted from communication with others (Blumer, 1934)

Since people use their mobile phones individually and subjectively, the relevance of this is eluded in the Symbolic Interactionism Theory which viewed an individual as a subject with a social position. The individual was responsible for designing the communication context identity. Blumer's (1934) theory explains that 'meaning' was reflected on the ability of human beings to act towards people and things based on individual meanings assigned to those people or things.

From the literature review herein, the youth's mobile phone experience deconstructed communication relationships between them and their parental figures. The parents felt that the youth no longer paid attention to conversations in the family but concentrated mostly on activities revolving around their mobile phones as observed by Drago (2015). Making inferences from Blumer's (1934), this was the 'meaning' aspect of the theory that parents' assigned in their interpretation of the youth's engagement with the mobile phone.

Carter and Fuller (2015) and Madukwe and Madukwe (2012) depict the family as a unit of interacting personalities. In family interactions, human behavior was understood from symbols, which emerged through human interaction (Blumer, 1934). Carter and Fuller (2015) agreed with Blumer (1934) who opined that Symbolic Interactionism thrived on the perspective of 'roles'. Social institutions were made up of roles into which individuals fit. The family had a role of a father, mother, children, sibling etc. Fusun and Sebnem (2015) observed that these roles preexisted rather than negotiated by participants. Fusun and Sebnem (2015) stated further that these roles linked up the functionalistic view of the society, especially when the society was described as being made up of institutionalized norms and values.

Nonetheless, Elsobeihi and Naser (2017) advance an argument that mobile telephony was changing the nature of communication through its services such as e-mail, chats, voice calls and message texting, therefore deconstructing the preexisting institutionalized norms and values. With relevance to this review, the new media and communication technologies built upon the concept of interactionism while promoting interaction and active participation as advocated by the Symbolic Interactionism Theory.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Adoption of Mobile Telephony

Scholars like Elsobeihi and Naser (2017) observed that the mobile phone technology and gadget was so coveted that it had almost become a cultural symbol of the contemporary times, accelerating and sweeping social and cultural changes. This communication technology is believed to be impacting on social relationships and could serve as a framework for examining these relationships. Drago (2015) and Whittney (2014) concur that mobile phones have become very personal and users continued to use them individually compared to the ancient fixed telephone lines that were almost communal and mostly in an open place.

Elsobeihi and Naser (2017) suggested that mobile phone users were evolving with this communication technology revolution. The scholars affirmed that the society had witnessed a revolutionary development in mobile technologies as developers and innovators of mobile technologies competed to attract the increasingly growing wide section of mobile users to fulfill users' demands. Elsobeihi and Naser (2017) justified the high level of adoption of this technology by the youth resulted from the perceived privacy which the youth preferred as they communicated with family members and others. Drago (2015) says the youth were seen to have more freedom in carrying out social relations that had become so essential in their lives that it defined who they were.

Rice, Haynes, Royce and Thompson (2016) and Goswami and Singh (2016) acknowledged the society's transformation to a digital communication world that had enhanced user's networking. These scholars' views, echoed McLuhan (1962, 1964) who argued that the society was shaped by the communication technologies of the present time. Other early scholars in mobile telephony such as Castells, Mireia, Jack, Qiu and Araba (2007) documented that the communication modes had shifted from the traditional approach to networks that took consideration of shared interests ignoring the geographic space and describing it as the rise of a new network society.

Mamman-Muhammad and Ogbu (2018) advance the adoption of this technology had reorganized human interactions to new levels. The individual person to person communication had gained momentum creating a shift from place based communication. The wireless personal communication was the present and the future. In demographics adoption preferences, Rice, et al (2016) cited the youth topping the adoption list.

3.2 The Rise of Social Media

Aishwarya and Vinod (2017) described the social media as the inevitable online network that connects people all over the world. They made a claim that social media played a pivotal role in all spheres of the present world. Nonetheless, they observed that over access of social media by the youth was almost becoming a vice. They described the social media as a virtual world where the current generation hardly looked at each other's face to interact with. Nonetheless, Shabnoor and Tajinder (2016) looked at the positive side of the social media. They claimed that the social media came with the opportunity benefits of branding, promotion of any products or business. On the contrary, Aishwarya and Vinod (2017) lamented about the present generation's over dependence on online communication that made this generation lose the ability for face to face communication and weaken communication systems in the family.

According to Joo and Teng (2017) the youth got addicted to social networking sites and thus got diverted from family social relations. Earlier on people took offense if people pried on their diaries since they were considered as private documents but Aishwarya and Vinod (2017) observed people got irritated in the present times if others failed to notice or comment on their activities published online. Besides, Joo and Teng (2017) were also cautious over the quantity and or quality of emerging trends in communication. Not only was the language affected in terms of spelling and grammar but also Joo and Teng (2017) observed the youth used the virtual world to showcase a good image of themselves through uploading of edited photographs or updates that could be different from the reality.

3.4 The Mobile Youth Culture

The youth's desire to be part of a communicating group reflects Castells' et al (2007) mobile youth culture. The youth sought mobile phones capable of hosting trending applications which aided them form deliberate communities perceived as great social communication opportunities. According to Shabnoor and Tajinder (2016) mobile phone applications appealing to the youth kept them busy to an extent of annoying other members of the family. The deconstruction of family communication was further exhibited from the youth's reduced desire for face to face

communication with family members as observed by Yu, et al (2017).

This negative mobile youth culture strongly integrated into the youth's behavior whose symptoms of addiction were reflected in their day to day activities. Whittney (2014) observes the youth's paralinguistic features demonstrated a lack of interest during interaction. Addiction to the use of popular applications was enormous to an extent of making parents apprehensive. Aishwarya and Vinod (2017) posit that mobile phones dictated and controlled the youth's daily routine. Blumer' (1934) Symbolic Interactionism Theory is emphatic that people behaved based on what they believed in attributing to their personal social constructs. The youth gave the mobile phone use a priority at the expense of family.

IV. CONCLUSION

The mobile telephony as a communication technology is deeply entrenched in the society's domestic social life and cannot just be whisked away. The uses of mobile telephony have continued to shape communications patterns that have made the youth prefer mobile communication at the expense of face to face interactions with family members. It can be concluded that embracing this technology has had far reaching effects on communication, almost deconstructing the family into a new 'voiceless' culture. Nonetheless, this review does not in any way condemn the adoption of mobile telephony but advocates for proper usage to enhance better family relationships through communication.

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