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## Editorial Note

Undoubtedly, the human family is one of the most threatened units of our individual and communal existence. Many have argued that the family's failure or success reflects the order in the development of society. This unvarnished truth and the consequences of ignoring it account for establishing a journal devoted exclusively to family life - *International Journal of Family Life and Societal Development*. This journal, conceived as a means and avenue to express concern and interrogate pressing family issues and proffer solutions, is not a confessional one; it takes discursive and practical approaches to issues on family life from interdisciplinary perspectives.

In this maiden volume, Stephen Ayankeye argues that there is a nexus between family integration and societal development. Inversely, a disintegrated family will lead to the underdevelopment of society. He further argues that there are factors that engender family integration but that those factors are now being challenged. He recommends ways of ensuring that the challenges are tackled. Benson Igboin interrogates the effects of social media on family life. He argues that society is dynamic, and globalisation has ambivalent impacts on family life. While it is now practically impossible to insulate family life from social media, he concludes that reasonable and responsible deployment of social media will enhance family unity and connectedness. Sharon Slater's article examines the integration of family and the family's protection in Nigeria and Africa. Slater argues that the assault on children and families in Nigeria is propelled by the global sexual revolution, to which many parents in Africa have not given sufficient attention. She notes that this revolution should be viewed from a human rights perspective to challenge its causes and effects on African families, particularly young people. She thus recommends that parents and the African government have critical roles to play in safeguarding the sexual health of their children.

On his own, Elijah Adeyinka examines the effects of postmodernism on the African family system. He points out that postmodernism's tilt

towards relativism adversely impacts family life. In order to stem the tide of postmodernism's inroad into the family, he suggests that family life should be guided strictly by enduring biblical principles. Oluwakemi Amuda's article intervenes by highlighting the critical role of effective communication within the family. She argues that when there is adequate and mutual communication in the family, faith is developed, which results in the development of the whole person. For Abosede Ayinde, violence against the female gender in the family and society has remained unabated. Ayinde notes that contemporary society has been unable to arrest violence against the female gender. She also examines the biblical basis of violence against the female gender and recommends ways to ameliorate it. John Oladapo echoes the argument that the challenges of the modern family system directly link with societal development. He argues that the African family system is being critically neglected, and the consequences are dire and visible. He, therefore, recommends the need to pay urgent attention to those values that sustained the family system before modernity unleashed its forces on it. Princess and Raphael Idialu reaffirm the argument that effective communication in the family has a way of dispelling and resolving conflict. They examine effective communication skills to demonstrate that family health will be maintained and sustained when emplaced. Foluke Odesola articulates that parenting is critical to the healthy growth and development of the child. Effective parenting, she argues, leads to arresting juvenile delinquency. As a result, she recommends that effective parenting is a sine qua non for guiding the child through the challenges that the teenage period of development poses.

Ogbeni Sylvester examines the role of education in the development of the family. Although education costs are high and hardly affordable, he argues that education is essential to the family and society. He suggests ways through which parents could navigate the challenges the cost of education has posed in contemporary society. Michael Otun introduces the ethical and religious dilemma many Christian couples face in deciding whether or not to resort to IVF in

their quest to procreate. He argues that the decision is not easy because of many interpretations of scriptures and pressures that are brought to bear on couples. He thus concludes that couples should weigh the moral implications of IVF before taking their final decision. Finally, Andrew Itakorode Olanrewaju examines the causes and effects of drug abuse among youth. He argues that despite concerted efforts to discourage the youth from engaging in substance abuse, the reality on the ground shows an increase in the number of those involved. He recommends that parents and government should intensify efforts towards ensuring that the youth are dissuaded from abusing drugs because of their harmful effects on them and society.

Benson Ohihon Igboin  
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# **EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FAMILY LIFE**

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## **Abstract**

This article argued that just as society is dynamic, so are the media of communication. Although many works have been carried out on the effects of media on family life, adequate attention has not been paid to social media in this regard. Utilising both primary and secondary sources, the article used Michel Foucault's transgressive theory to analyse the effects of social media on the family. It found out that although social media has negative effects on families, there are also positive contributions to enhancing family solidarity. It thus concluded that social media could be managed to minimize their corrosive effects on family life.

## **Introduction**

In November 2015, Pope Francis visited Africa. Before the visit, the traditional and social media were awash with expectations and calls on the Pope to say something definite about homosexual unions. Eventually, when he arrived, he spoke glowingly about traditional African family values that have respect for elders and children. He states,

The health of any society depends on the health of its families... Kenyan society has long been blessed with strong family life, a deep respect for the wisdom of the elderly and love for children.... Let the great values of Africa's traditions, the wisdom and truth of God's word, and the generous idealism of your youth guide you in working to shape a society which is ever more just, inclusive and respectful of human dignity (Harris, 2015,n. p.).

Family is usually conceived as the basic unit of the community. It has also been described as the place where the socialization of the child takes place. It is the arena of human mutuality. Family as a concept has increasingly become difficult to define despite these functions. Religion, culture, modernity, globalization, and others have shaped and impacted the family's meaning, understanding and value. It has been argued that “the family is a human system that has a life of its own that must be understood in terms of ever-expanding contexts of mutual influence. The family has a history that is best understood as a life cycle with predictable and unpredictable crises” (Anderson, Foley, Miller-McLemore and Schreiter 2004,5). Thus, as a human system, the family constitutes independent and yet interdependent persons. Being independent suggests that each family member has choices to make and responsibilities to discharge on their own. Being interdependent means that each family member needs one another and is accountable to each other. The choices made and actions enacted are not value-free; they have consequences on every member of the family because they are knitted together. This intertwinement forms the nucleus of the communal life that a family is traditionally associated with. This accounts for the understanding of family as a place of mutual influence. Mutual influence is a habitus, a carefully, consciously developed virtue, a way of being in relations rather than a natural aptitude or accidental mutuality. In other words, even though we, as human beings in a family setting, have a natural inclination to love, we certainly do not naturally know how to love. Thus, in a family, love is learnt and developed as a skill and an art; it is indeed a discipline, a course that requires continuous initiation, nurturing and development. The same mutuality principle applies to communication (Wadell, 14).

But family as a human system is not static; it is dynamic. Its dynamism is critical to the effect that it will become staid if we do not countenance and diligently appropriate it. Because of this dynamism, the family must be approached in terms of predictable and unpredictable crises, which contemporary society is laced and faced with. The predictable and unpredictable events in the family depend

on the nature of those who constitute the family; their values, virtues and goals for the family.

I will demonstrate this more vividly later when discussing family as a human organization. Nevertheless, it will suffice here to state that human beings can be both predictable and unpredictable, and thus they can precipitate ideas and actions that are predictable and unpredictable, even in a family. It is pertinent to state that the predictability and unpredictability of crises in the family can be culture-based, while culture is also dynamic. Institutions and government policies can also cause predictable and unpredictable crises in families. However, there are occasions in the development of a culture that unpredictable influence struggles with and acts as a predator on a particular culture. For instance, many years back, it would have been difficult to conceive that same-sex marriage would be legalized even in the United States because those who engaged in same-sex practices were routinely arrested and prosecuted. But today, the situation has changed. It is not that it has changed in the US alone; the decriminalization of same-sex unions has become both a political and diplomatic weapon to coerce other developing countries that believe that the practice is anti-culture to decriminalize it. Studies have also shown how the Industrial Revolution in the West has changed and continued to change the constitution and understanding of the family; how roles of each member have changed as well as their rights. In fact, the democratization of Western societies has also impacted the understanding of the family and introduced such concepts as “just love” in replacement of “unconditional love.” Individualism in its severe form has also resulted from the democratization of the family: expressive.

Individualism has conflicted with the family's need for accommodation and compromise of a personal desire to maintain and sustain mutuality and communality in the family. In addition, the democratization of the family has raised and escalated gender issues and rights in the family. These and many other issues once thought exclusively Western are now deeply entrenched in the African family system. In other words, globalization has affected the African family system in ways different from its traditional conception.

But the question is: how does the foregoing relate to social media and its effects on the family? I will argue that the family's history as a human system cannot be divorced from communication. Communication is essential in the family system; it is indeed the instrument through which the essence and value of the family are mutually shared, transmitted, preserved, socialized, evaluated and reproduced. Communication is the ritual that transmits meaning among members of the family and beyond. "In both profane and sacred settings, the communication of meaning to both human and divine witnesses takes place through repetition of symbolic actions" (Adekakun, 2021,1). In other words, communication "rituals are essential and powerful means for making the world a habitable and hospitable place. They are the basic vehicles for creating and expressing meaning. They are an indispensable medium by which we make our way through life" (Anderson and Foley, 1998,22). As it has been noted that family is dynamic, it must also be acknowledged that communication and its modes are dynamic, fluid, evolving, and globalizing. This immediately suggests that the family cannot be left behind in the fluid mode of communication; it must develop along the strokes of contemporary communications technologies to be relevant. It must provide enduring values to stem the tide of corrosive effects of its values in the jet age. Social or traditional media as a means of communication negatively and positively impact the family.

### **Theoretical Foregrounding**

In this work, I use transgressive theory to analyze how social media or any mode of communication at all transgresses geographical and emotional distance. Loosely, I define geographical distance as the space created between two or more places, and emotional distance is conceptualized as the emotional feeling of the absence of a person due to geographical distance.

When we talk about transgression, we may quickly bring in theological meaning loudly present in the Christian Lord's Prayer, which teaches the request for vertical forgiveness from God and reciprocal obligation for horizontal forgiveness among men. Beyond

that, transgression could mean “crossing boundaries”: that is, “the ability to go beyond limits and conventions, to deny and affirm differences, to move against and beyond boundaries” (Reimer-Kirkham, Sharma, Brown, and Calestani, 2020, 8). Reimer-Kirkham, Sharma, Brown, and Calestani (2020, 8) expounded the theory of transgression on Michel Foucault's explanation that limit and transgression are mutually dependent. According to Foucault, “a limit could not exist if it was absolutely uncrossable, and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.” The pertinent task here is to disentangle what becomes of a limit after a transgression has taken place. Concerning social media as a transgressive mode, we are to determine what becomes of a geographical distance after transgression in the form of communication has taken place, “the moment that limits do not contain” (Ibid). I argue that no matter the ubiquity and fluidity social media has achieved through its transgressive powers and influence, the emotional void created by geographical distance cannot be fully met except via geographical proximity and physical, emotional reconnection, especially within the frames of family. I then argue that crossing geographical distance and dissolving space through social media communication in a family can only satisfy the family momentarily but produce a deeper emotional vacuum that face-to-face communication and reconnection can heal more deeply.

Before the emergence of information technology (IT), a global village theory had been envisaged, which the proponents argued would result in a borderless society and make geographical proximity irrelevant in social relations. Today, IT has transgressed geographical distance and brought some form of emotional proximity. In fact, social media has created an e-village that virtually brings almost everyone to the village square to discuss, dialogue, chat, contend, assess, bargain, trade, politick, socialize and so on. Social media has indeed incredibly increased the volume of communications across the globe in a short while. Although social media must have transgressed traditional and electronic borders, it

has not made geographical and emotional proximity irrelevant as some had thought it would. Studies and reality have shown that yearning for geographical and emotional proximity in an e-world has seriously increased (Goldberg and Levy, n. p.) Patacchini (2015) reinforces Goldenberg and Levy's position that both theoretical and empirical studies show that the volume of social media interactions has not reduced the need for physical communication. Social media seems to have increased the emotional yearning to knit together in a traditional form.

### **The Family as a Human System**

The simple definition of family is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting or communicating with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children, and siblings. The family has many qualifiers: traditional, nuclear, extended, Christian, Islamic and so on. For there to be a family, there must be at least five characteristics: there must be at least three persons; marriage is its foundation; change of status of the couple from bride to wife to mother and bridegroom to husband to father; changes continue as more children are born to the basic family unit; recognition that the foundation of the family are the spouses. It has to be borne in mind that the sequence given above may not be routinely followed in many contemporary family settings. Marriage, which is traditionally regarded as the starting point of a family, may sometimes come after children must have been born. Marriage itself is challenging, if not impossible, to define with acuity. For instance, when one man marries one woman only, it is generally, but erroneously defined as monogamy. In an actual sense, monogamy occurs when one man marries one woman only (monogyny), and one woman marries one man only (monoandry) at the same; it is when both monogyny and monoandry happen at the same time that we can have monogamy. But we cannot but realise that “marriage is *a rearrangement of existing relationships*” rather than narrowly conceived as “*a rearrangement for the sake of subsequent relationships*” (Gittins, 168). But whether we agree or not, contemporary marriage tends toward the latter as an ideal and goal to

pursue.

We can distinguish between the family of orientation and a family of procreation. The former has to do with the family we are born into, the family within which we are orientated, socialized and cultivated. It is the family our parents instituted. The latter is the family we have formed; the family we have established within which we raise our children. Beyond these two is the family of choice, which is also increasingly finding its way into the African family. The family of choice is “identifiable by the freely undertaken commitment of its members.” Gittins exemplifies it this way:

My own 'family of choice' includes my adopted daughter, her three adopted children, and her one natural child; her common-law husband; and the adopted mother of my daughter, who is neither my wife nor my lover, but my friend. The common-law husband is the father of my daughter's natural child and also one of her adopted children, who is the half brother of the two other adopted children. All three adopted children have different fathers but the same mother – who is not their adoptive mother (Gittins 179).

The family of choice is a complex family, real but does not conform to the traditional patriarchal heterosexual family known in the Christian and African family systems. The family of choice is an existential or circumstantial family; it meets the need of its members and forms a basis for their fulfilment. This inconceivably sociological family is fundamental in Africa, too; it generates a theological basis for the crucible of love of persons, that is, persons upon whom grace must be shown. My family also exemplifies this form of the family: I had an uncle and an aunt who were not biological children of my grandfather but whose mothers were my aunts and daughters of my grandfather. Both of them have siblings from the same mothers but not the same fathers. These uncles and aunts bore the same surname as me and their own mothers, my aunts. While they were my grandfather's children, they were also his children. Both of them shared the property of their father (my grandfather), like their mothers (my aunts).

Perhaps, I should complicate the conception of the family system more by adding this: I worked on transsexualism in my doctoral programme. Simply put, transsexualism has to do with a process whereby a man or a woman believes that his or her soul is incompatible with his or her body. That is, one can argue, in the case of a man, that while his soul is feminine, his body is masculine, and in the case of a woman, while her body is feminine, her soul is masculine. They thus feel that a male soul is incongruous with a female body and that a female soul is incompatible with a male body. In this situation, the transsexual feels that he or she is not a wholly fulfilled person despite the position of biogenetic formation of maleness and femaleness. Therefore, to align their bodies with the desired souls and vice versa, they may go through hormonal therapy or sex reassignment surgery. The sex reassignment surgery, which is irreversible once carried out, entails the evacuation of the sex organs of a particular transsexual and the replacement of the opposite sex organs or the desired sex organs. In other words, a male transsexual who wants to become a female person will surgically evacuate his male sex organs and replace them with female sex organs. Through hormonal therapy, he can now develop the female body structure – body politic! At this stage, he has transitioned from male to female, dressed as female, and act as a female, but is limited in the biological-reproductive process. Of course, this limitation has also been overcome through in vitro fertilization. One of my case studies was a lady who married and gave birth to two children before she transitioned from female to male. After she had successfully transitioned and become a man, he formally changed *her* name and bore a masculine name. In his new formation or gender as a man, his two children have a biological father and transsexual father who was once their biological mother. At this point of transition, the two children have no mother but two 'fathers' because they can only relate to both parents as fathers and males. However, it is a family, not of choice but of procreation and design (Igboin, 2010).

Gay and lesbian families are also human, even though they disagree with other generally acceptable family forms. This is a form of the

family established based on a biological man marrying another biological man or a biological woman marrying another biological woman. These couples may adopt children to fulfil the family characteristics described above. The lesbian couple can go through in vitro fertilization to raise children. In either case, the children, whether adopted or biological, have both parents being the same sex. Another widespread cultural family in Africa and some other places is the woman-to-woman family, which is not lesbian in nature and function. In a lesbian union, the two married females have sexual intercourse, whereas, in woman-to-woman marriage, the female husband assumes the duties of a husband to the female wife, except for sexual intercourse. In southeastern Nigeria, where this is common, the female husbands usually profit from “their productive and reproductive activities – hence the reference to 'female husbands’” (Hanson, 2014,194). Although the Supreme Court of Nigeria has outlawed this form of family, the practice may not have died completely. Evans-Prichard also notes amongst the Nuer thus:

What seems to us, but not at all to Nuer, a somewhat strange union is that in which a woman marries another woman and counts as the *pater* of the children born of the wife. Such marriages are by no means uncommon in Nuerland, and they must be regarded as a form of simple *legal marriage*, for the woman-husband marries her wife in exactly the same way as a man marries a woman (Carrier and Murray, 1998,254).

Other forms of the family exist, but the point I want to make is that any form of the family involves human beings. Hence the family is a human organization, and their qualifiers instantiate different modes and levels of communication. Nevertheless, what makes a family qua family is the bond among its members; the emotional attachment, the we-feeling and mutuality that no other human organization can readily offer. This bond separates one family from another and makes it unique in its entirety. This bond provides and guarantees security for its members against internal and external threats. Within this bond exists a family language or communication code, a specially

developed but confidential language of communication, different from general language and its nuances in the community, which all members learn as they socialize in the family. Most traditional families speak a coded language in a larger community. The coded language can be both verbal and non-verbal in nature. But the essence is that effective communication occurs insofar as the members understand one another.

### **Traditional Communication in the Family System**

We cannot productively talk about communication without understanding geography's influence on it. Geographical proximity or distance naturally creates the thirst for communication. This is because there is an emotional gulf that geographical distance creates, which needs to be filled by communication. There is an absence that needs a presence to heal it, even though that presence is symbolic, in terms of communication. Maintaining emotional presence due to geographical distance is a critical reason why communication in the family is imperative. For instance, children born to the same family grow up to socialize together, communicate and bond. As it is well established, most family members do not always live together forever. There comes a time when they have to leave home to pursue different goals in different places. Space is created by leaving their home, both geographically and emotionally. Moreover, this gap has to be filled through communication so that all can be knitted together. Before we discuss social media and its effects on the family, let us briefly discuss the traditional mode of communication before the rise of social media. Oral communication mode is the oldest form of human communication and remains the most effective to date. Words are vehicles of communication of information, emotions, thoughts, and ideas from one person to another. This means of communication entails giving and receiving what is being communicated within geographical proximity. It is a transactional exchange that is highly symbolic. It is a means of creating and sharing meanings in a family setting. This exchange in the word is basic, primary, encompassing, enlivening, therapeutic and inspiring. In a family, communication is not just an everyday activity but also a therapy and recipe for human

flourishing. It has been argued that communication is never too much in a family; the more communication members engage in, the more bonding exists amongst them. Communication in the family plays a pivotal role in building and maintaining relationships both at leisure and during serious engagements. This face-to-face, verbal communication system takes place in everyday settings at a meal, work, leisure, and festival. For instance, a rehash of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe will clearly explain how oral communication in a family, household and community took place. Suppose there is anything that modern communication systems and devices are taking away from us. In that case, it is the moonlight story time when family and communal values were communicated and taught in a didactic manner, where riddles and proverbs provided advanced epistemological courses. Mathematics of community and inter-community relationships were solved in a relaxed open-air space. This advanced communication course could take the form of a palaver, where everyone present often seemed to talk simultaneously, yet everyone listened to everything being said. As some Western scholars have criticized, palaver is never a superfluous talk; on the other hand, the means through which complex family and community issues are resolved in the act of frank talk, rigorous thinking and honest delivery of each person's narrative.

Letter writing as a mode of communication was a cherished instrument of communication. Even though it used to take some time to arrive, at least from my local experience, the local postmaster's announcement that one had a letter had both emotional and physical pride and fulfilment. Although we hardly maintain family archives in this part of the world, it has been observed that such letters are still cherished and kept as much as possible because of their historical and emotional value.

It is instructive to add that the transportation system filled the geographical space and absence from home. One of my interviewees, Mrs. Iruolagbe narrated how she used to wake up early, around 4:00 am, and trek to another town where there was a motor park to send

verbal and symbolic messages to her daughter in Lagos in the 1970s to early 80s. According to her, she would usually receive a response from her daughter in four days.

But seeing the eyes that saw my daughter and her family was the affective presence I often felt. I watched the mouth of the driver as he narrated or described my daughter. I could feel my daughter's mood through the driver's words. It helped me to visualize my daughter and her wellbeing. A few questions I asked the driver and how he responded usually helped me to know her state of mind. Whenever she sent a gift, I hold it close to my chest with smiles. Back home in my room, I sang and danced quietly. I would then feel her presence, and prayed for her.

Iruolagbe's experience adds an essential dimension to communication in the family. That is, communication has a spiritual value. It knits the family together in the same spiritual fold and helps them to maintain mental health. The anxiety that characterized her daughter's absence is replaced with smiles, singing, dancing and praying whenever she received news from her through the driver. Both emotional and spiritual bond is ritualized, and the geographical distance is momentarily dissolved.

When I asked Mr. David to tell me about his first experience with a telephone as a means of communication with his daughter, who was then in Lagos, he said:

I didn't believe that it was my daughter's voice I was hearing clearly as if she was present with us physically. I had to look around to be sure that nobody was playing some pranks on us (my wife and me). However, as the conversation continued, I still believed that she was hiding in a nearby room, would step out as soon as the trick was over. My wife was anxious. I had to give her the phone, and they spoke for some time. It was when they were conversing that I went round the house,

but didn't see her or hear her voice. I then realized that my daughter wasn't in Benin truly. But her voice brought her presence to us.... That night, I dreamed of her continuing with the conversation during the day.... Subsequently, I was more relaxed talking with her on phone. Her voice echoed in my mind for several days after.... The conversation reminded me about her childhood and many other things we experienced when she was growing up.

According to Mrs. David,

We all went together (referring to her husband and other children) to make those calls in uncle's house (referring to her brother in-law). Everybody would talk on phone. After the phone conversation, we would usually unconsciously break into a family meeting. Although such meetings were normally unstructured, we discussed diverse issues affecting the family. Many long-standing disagreements between me and him (referring to her husband, Mr. David) would just be resolved. We would forgive one another in the euphoria of communicating with our daughter. ... But we didn't always have opportunity to discuss private issues as mother and daughter. Even though she would want to confide in me, my response would announce the secrets we wanted to share privately to everyone in the parlor. But that did not replace the joy of knowing how she was doing in Lagos.

From the Davids' narratives, we can glean that communication in the family (1) produces supersensory effects when he has to continue with the conversation in his dream; (2) results in sharing of value among family members, thereby maintaining bond; (3) creates active and affective presence and lights up the gap created by geographical and emotional absence (4) offers the opportunity for recall of historical events and memorials; (5) leads to reconciliation and; (6) that telephonic conversation in a communal setting does not give adequate room for private discussion, unlike the mobile phone.

Studying “ritual activities” as a means of communication in family is

also important. Ritual activities are those activities members of a family share in rather than direct communication. Ritual activities help to create a sense of connection, connectedness, hierarchy, and boundaries. These activities fill a void created by geographical distance, separation, divorce, or natural occurrences such as death. For instance, the girl-child is socialized to emulate her mother in many ways, like domestic chores and social and cultural values. As the child grows up and even leaves home, she invokes the presence of her mother by acting precisely as her mother. Sometimes, she sings her mother's best lyrics by mimicking them. According to Mrs. Iruolagbe,

When I began to act exactly like my mother, may be sang like she used to sing, gesticulate in similar ways like she would, I realized that I was missing her. Acting the same way she acted when we were together as a young girl would bring a sense of connection between us. Sometimes, I would act like my father.... Whenever my husband noticed it, he would tease me and lit up my mood.... But one thing I noticed was that a few days after, I would sometimes receive messages from them. It was as if they too were missing me at the same time I was missing them.... After my mother's death, I still unconsciously continued, and remembered her stories and instructions she had given me while alive.

Ritual activities instantiate the fact that even though social media can transgress geographical distance, the need for emotional reconnection is deeply ingrained in a bonded family.

### Social Media as a Revolution of Communication System

Social media is a means to an end and not an end itself. Social media has revolutionized the global communications system. It has quickly contested and almost wholly overshadowed the conventional or traditional modes of communication. It is a 'transgressive' communication mode with far-reaching implications. It has been defined as interactive technologies that enable the creation and

sharing of information, ideas, interest, and other forms of expression through virtual networks and communities such as Facebook/Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype, Tiktok, WeChat, Instagram, Ozone, Weibo, Twitter, Tumblr, Baidu Tieba, LinkedIn, and so forth. We can also understand social media as a group of technologies known for their fast, easy and widely vast and accessible information through online platforms. These can be in the form of mobile or website applications, which individuals and a group of persons can utilize to generate, share or analyse information in digitized environments.

New media represents “an elemental metamorphosis into multiple dialogues within a community from monologues in media broadcast. This transformation mirrors the process of the internet revolution dubbed Web 2.0.” At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the internet suddenly changed the degree and mode of communication worldwide. The information generated by anyone is made available to all interested users (Nyambura, 2020:13). The point must be made that social media has become an intrinsic part of the contemporary family. Its dynamic effects have to be evaluated with caution.

We cannot underestimate the influence and reach of social media in contemporary society. We have witnessed the political impact of social media on governance across the world. The Arab Spring that started in 2011 in Tunisia and spread to Syria is one of the results of social media mobilization by the youth. The revolution this social media mobilization caused has emboldened other youth in different places to challenge corrupt political officers and the government. In fact, many secrets or confidential reports that would have remained inaccessible to the public have been freely circulated online, some with dire consequences. In Nigeria, the #EndSARS protests of 2020 started on social media. Youth all over the country used Twitter as a social medium to express their excruciating experiences at the hands of the police unit called Special Anti-Robbery Squad. With gory pictures and videos uploaded, the protests could not be stopped, eventually leading to the unit's disbandment for the third time. Some have argued that the Nigerian government's suspension of Twitter

was not unconnected with the #EndSARS protests aided by the platform. However, the government now turns to social media to bridge the gap between it and citizens by frequently engaging them in the activities and policies of the government. Of course, political engineering now actively takes place in social media: online polls are conducted, political aspirants are assessed, and campaigns are carried out online. However, there is a need to conduct empirical research to determine the influence of online political engineering in a country whose electoral body relies on offline conduct of elections that encourages massive rigging, voting buying, thuggery and so on. Apart from political mobilization, many churches are now investing in social media. The lockdown of 2020 occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic radically changed the perception and utilization of social media in churches. Theological debates that it prompted were swiftly responded to in such a way as to keep the members in fellowship digitally. The transition from physical, offline church to digital, online church during COVID-19 has not been completely reversed, and one doubts if many churches would return fully to offline worship alone. Hybrid worship is now common among many churches, especially the Pentecostal brand (Igboin, 2022).

We cannot also underestimate the security challenges that social media engender worldwide. Bandit and terrorist groups effectively coordinate and execute their sinister plans precisely on their targets. Boko Haram and bandits in the northern parts of Nigeria and kidnappers and ritualists in the southern parts thoughtfully utilise social media platforms to carry out their activities. In fact, one of the reasons the Federal Government gave for the enforcement of compulsory linking of individual SIM with National Identification Number (NIN) is to be able to track the locations and activities of these groups to neutralize them. These influences ultimately impact the family.

### **Impact of Social Media on the Family**

The vast array of opportunities social media affords the family has become a matter of contention. The question is whether there is still communication in the family and if there is, what kind of

communication, and how does it impact the family? Social media's impact on family depends on certain characteristics of a particular family. In other words, the impact social media has on literate, semi-literate, traditional, intergenerational, and wealthy families will significantly differ from the other. The awareness of social media's impact differs from the acceptance of the effects. For instance, in a traditional family, the use of social media to bridge the gap created by geographical distance will be different from that of a literate or wealthy family where even children have access to or own their individual phones. It can be argued that while in the former, the opportunity to communicate with family members via social media, which is occasional, will be highly cherished. The opportunity will bring them back to their sense and value of communality through a virtual connection. The latter may rescind into rugged individualism, where everyone is concerned with, or concentrated on, what they believe is most important to them to the utter neglect of what should bond them as a family. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the social position, geographical distance, emotional bonding, accessibility to information communications technology and/or spiritual relations that exist in a family to determine social media's impact on it.

Furthermore, we must examine what has been referred to as “ritual communications” to ascertain the impact social media has on a family (Couture, 139). By ritual communication, we mean the mode of communication adopted by a geographically distant family, frequency and/or regularity, and contents of exchange. However, the mode of communication can evolve or change depending on social relations and accessibility to other means of communication. For instance, one interviewee told me he regularly wrote letters to his son in Germany in the 1990s. At least he would write five letters yearly, and his son responded to each. Later, the mode of communication changed when his son was able to install a landline telephone for him. The frequency of their communication changed. That is, they talked fortnightly on weekends. With the mobile phones, he could relate more emotionally with his son and his family: “I see my grandchildren via phone every time we talk. I see them grow over the

years. Recently, when they all visited home (Nigeria), I could easily recognize and call them by their names. We were all surprised that we knew one another even though we were physically meeting for the first time.”

Thus, discussing the impacts of social media – negative or positive – the question of *how* is paramount. How does a family handle or mishandle social media as a form of communication? This becomes necessary because, in the context of globalization, almost nobody is insulated from the effects of social media. Social media can enhance and create communication flow, generational gap and increased production of privatization of individual families just like it can cement them. The consequence of social media on the family, as shown below, is that it takes away face-to-face family meetings. In his proverbial response, an interviewee posited that “the social media now make our children like little birds who, after learning how to fly, will never return to the nest. They occasionally meet their mother in the air, chat and fly to other direction.” Nyambura observes thus: “face-to-face conversations among individual family members are gradually fading out where you find most individuals engrossed in their own virtual world and circle of online friends who they would rather share with their psychological and emotional challenges” (Nyambura, 2020, 4).

### **Positive Impact of Social Media on Family**

One of the advantages social media has brought to the family is that it makes communication easier, more accessible, faster, more frequent, cheaper, and more robust. It also helps to create, maintain or manage social relations amongst family members at both nuclear and extended levels. In this instance, social media fills the gaps created by geographical distance. It has been estimated that over a billion text messages are sent daily worldwide. In addition, the emotional bonds and needs of family members can be met using social media platforms. According to an interviewee, “I don't miss my husband as such since we bought our mobile phones. We do video calls almost every evening and share deep emotional feelings. We only continue

where we stop when we meet physically. But sincerely, the experiences differ between phone and physical meetings and conversations.” In another interview, a respondent stated that he assists his children with their assignments, frequently discusses other family matters, and enforces discipline when necessary. In addition, many families today have social media platforms, for example, WhatsApp, where members relate freely. Family events such as birthdays, marriage, and burial ceremonies are shared and discussed. Social media platforms have also helped families fill intergenerational gaps among their members. It makes the older members learn from, the younger ones and vice versa. With patience and respect, both groups begin to understand and manage the difference that the age gap has created, which geographical distance has amplified.

Although family almanacs, diaries and pictures gradually fade, digital archives are being massively replaced. Social media can be used to preserve family documents, values, traditions and cultures and is retrievable by future generations. Many families have resorted to using social media for memorials and digitizing their archives. On the spiritual front, many families agree that they use social media to connect with their members for prayers and devotions. Even though these spiritual exercises are not as organic as a face-to-face meeting, they have created an opportunity to unite to deal with family spiritual issues or challenges.

### **Some Negative Effects of Social Media on Family**

The idea of technologization of the child in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a product of social media addiction. This sometimes happens deliberately when parents give devices to their children in order to keep them away from distracting them. Gradually, the child gets used to it and regards the device as his companion, thereby estranging him from his parents, who want to accomplish their tasks at the expense of building human relations with their child. Technologization of the child can also take place when young children have uncontrolled

access to social media. Left unguided, the child develops an intimate interest in programmes and events on social media, which may sever him from parental care, love and relationship. Adults are also not insulated from technologization as couples can desire to fill the void caused by geographical distance through the addictive use of social media. Some marriages have collapsed because of addiction to social media: couples develop an interest in social media and diminish their relationship with themselves. Of course, many studies have revealed that couples who use password protection on their platforms which are not made known to their partners risk breeding suspicion and investigatory actions. Some such investigations have revealed acts of infidelity, which led to the collapse of such homes or marriages (Ngonidzashe, 2016,62-68).

It has also been observed that family life lived online caused disruption in some other families. Most families post unreal or phantastic sides of their lives online. This has caused envy and uncritical comparison amongst other families, eventually leading to social, family and unhealthy competition. The strong presence of make-believe on social media should be a concern for reasonable families; there is the need to verify whether or not the sudden transformation of families as posted online is real. Even when some postings are real, family consent might have been obtained before they are made public. 'Living online' has unnecessarily exposed some families to public gaze and scrutiny, leading to security challenges.

The spiritual life of families has also been negatively affected. In many families, the phone is the first thing to interact with in the morning and the last in the evening, either wanting to be the first to break the news or the first to share the breaking news. Many children in the family use social media almost all night long; this affects them academically, emotionally and spiritually as they hardly participate or concentrate during family devotion. In fact, many families are now addicted to entertainment platforms on social media to the neglect of spiritual exercise. According to Mrs Kenny, "I was so glued to Zee World that my spiritual life was adversely affected. I did not only

watch television programs, spending much time, but also online during office hours. Whenever I wanted to pray, my mind would roam about to the scenes I watched, and that would end the prayer. I lost spiritual concentration until some things happened in the family which helped me reverse my attention from Zee World and many other social media platforms.”

### **Suggestions and Conclusion**

At the beginning of this paper, I pointed out that the family is a human organization, and communication is critical to its social relations and values. I also pointed out various forms of families which make family a contested concept from one culture to another. But it is expedient to add here that the challenge of the contemporary family is compounded by the notion of nursery families, where a nursery family is understood as one composed of immature members. Unplanned parenting is taking a profound toll on families; children give birth to other children! The sexualization of the body and society means that children are exposed to sexual activities mainly through social media and practice what they are exposed to, which more or less results in unwanted pregnancies and unplanned families. Nursery families are often birthed from exposure to social media. They see it as a norm rather than assess its abusive effects on them. Therefore, it is difficult to restrain them from addiction to social media.

Education and counselling are critical to the family's reasonable use of social media platforms. The truth is that many positive things can be achieved using social media. However, family members need education to understand that there are both legal and social limits to what can be done using social media. The value of face-to-face meetings with family members should be emphasized as part of family socialization in this jet age. Within this, family members should be made to realize that the flow should be: face-to-face family - e-family - face-to-face family. The family is the child's first school; the values inculcated have deep roots in the development of the children. Therefore, efforts should be made to balance education and counselling on the use of social media. Of course, examples from

parents are essential to driving home the counselling. This is where responsible parenting comes in.

Government and schools also have roles to play in ensuring reasonable use of social media. Although the controversy that trailed the regulation of social media in the country was birthed by bad governance, the honest government can still make policies that will guide the usage of social media platforms. The schools are responsible for developing inclusive curricula that will countenance tips on the healthy use of social media. Urgent curriculum revision is needed in this direction (Ephraim, 2013, 2). Religious bodies are compelling means of transmission of values in the country. In fact, many people seem to adhere more to what their religious leaders tell them than the government. Patriotism towards religious organizations is stauncher than to government on many occasions. This places the task of educating families on the balanced use of social media on religious leaders.

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