The Impact of Online Communications on Different Users' Social, Emotional, and Moral Competence as a Potential Business Communication Tool

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Abstract. The digital age has seen a great increase in the number of internet users and reliance on online communications in particular. Youths or young people are among the most common groups who use the internet to interact or communicate with their peers, family, and friends. The current study explored the impact of online communications on the social, emotional, and moral competence of different users. The study findings revealed that online communication or interactions are essential in connecting distant friends or relatives through virtual communication. However, it was revealed that over dependence on different online interaction platforms could relatively impact the social, emotional, and moral competence of the users, especially the youth or young.

Keywords: social media, online communication, emotional impact, business communication.

1. Introduction

Social media or digital media is radically influencing the manner in which people interact or communicate thereby affecting their mindsets, attitude and experiences. With increase in the use of the internet most especially among the young, the perceptions or reactions towards the different aspects of life has greatly changed among different groups of people (Brady et al., 2017). New technologies in the field of virtual or online communication pose a great impact on the emotional, social and moral competences among internet users particularly the young, adolescents or youth. Increased use of virtual communication platforms has greatly influenced the performance of children in schools, the increased the desire for supremacy and the love for quick solutions to complex problems thereby affecting the level of patience among internet users (Riva et al., 2016). The Internet has clearly become a very important tool in the field of communication most especially among the young generation who use it majorly to connect with their fellow peers for knowledge sharing or forming strong relationships. The different tools of the internet are increasingly being an educational tool for different levels of education and this has had a great impact on the academic capabilities of students. The issue of the potential impact of the Internet and especially computer-related communication in the form and quality of communication among the young has attracted great attention in the recent past (Malle & Scheutz, 2014).

Miah (2018) explored the level to which technology humanity most concerning the cognitive, social, and emotional wellbeing of individuals. The study revealed that those who spend most of their valuable time on the Internet are often preoccupied with several thoughts about things to do online when they are offline. "Addictive" technology is difficult to limit online activities whether they interfere with work, study, financial well-being, or community activities. Globokar (2018) indicates that whereas some internet users experience technology as the cause of the problem, others believe that technology only shows problematic proposals that people already possess. Some allow technology to interfere with their lives, while others know when to turn off a device and return to our social, family, educational, or economic activities.

Globokar (2018) argues that despite the fact that some internet users experience several problems with increased use of technology, other users have continuously revealed that increased technology use has no influence on their moral social or emotional development. This therefore indicates that the interpretation of the different aspects of online communication varies across different groups of people. Darling-Churchill & Lippman (2016) indicate that people who are addicted to the internet are faced with different dynamics that greatly affect their social, emotional and moral wellbeing. This paper presents the latest research on the general impact of online communication on the social, emotional and moral competences of the users.

2. Literature Review

This section presents a review of literature concerning the impact of online communication on the social, emotional and moral competences of individuals.

2.1. Impact of online communication

The fundamental position concerning online communication is that it has a significant impact on the emotional, social, and moral wellbeing of the users. In situations where children are much involved in different online activities, there is a high possibility that they could develop unique skills and acquire more knowledge concerning different aspects. However over reliance on online communication can have severe implications on the general development and well-being of an individual (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016). The impact of online communication on the different aspects of social, emotional and moral competences is explained below.

2.1.1. Social competences

The increased use of different social media or digital media platforms has continued to influence the establishment and maintaining of different social relationships. However, most of the relationships formed through virtual communication are considered unreal hence most of them have failed to help but rather lead to exhaustion of the involved parties (Owens et al., 2018). Virtual communication makes social relationships less risky and to a greater extent less painful, hence it is always very easy to withdraw from such relationships formed on the internet. However, in the real world, the establishment of genuine and long-lasting relationships is very complex hence requires more commitment and acceptance for both parties. This makes relationships in the contemporary world more real than those formed on the internet which makes individuals addicted to online communication less human (Morata, 2020).

Owens et al. (2018) indicate that social or digital media affects the general conveyance of different meta-messages since on-line communication does not involve physical or face to face based conversations. However measures are still exchanged virtually via the phone hence an individual is still able to acknowledge the different dynamics of the voice and color in case of video calls. It is important to note that social networking allows internet users to establish a virtual self which can be utilized to connect with other people of similar or different beliefs. It is normally very difficult to resolve different conflicts that may arise during online interactions in a virtual world. This is majorly due to lack of body contact or body language and real tone of voice etc during the process of communication which tends to increase the chances of misunderstandings(Lee, 2009). Furthermore, written messages via whatsapp, Facebook or Twitter can be forwarded to other people who are not part of the conversion, and this can lead to abuse. For example a negative comment made on

Facebook can leave a very deep impact or consequence on the sender as compared to communication conducted through face-to-face encounters (Globokar, 2018).

The social perspective through most internet users both young and old grow up is currently associated with a high-level of individualism(Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Morata, 2020). The different needs or desires of an individual are considered first in any online conversation hence there is little empathy for the different needs or rights of other people. The major values of modern society include: freedom, autonomy, and a high level of tolerance. However, individuals have failed to meet these values of the society when engaged in online communication (Brady et al., 2017). The different social networks are developed to enable individuals to connect and interact easily among each other. Different studies confirm that most of today's young people, despite the increase in the connection though social networking, are increasingly becoming lonely in real life and fail to see any future aspects with online relationships. Studies indicate that online communications have increased the feelings of loneliness to a greater margin as compared to 20 years ago most especially among young people on the rage of 18 to 35 years(Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

2.1.2.   Emotional competences

The use of different internet-based communication channels, devices or platforms has a great impact on the general development of both cognitive and emotional competences of the users most especially the young people. The interactions undertaken on the on-line communication platforms render a significant transformation on the level of thinking among the young (van den Eijnden et al., 2008).

Kolucki & Lemish (2011) indicate that the different aspects of digital or online communications help in transforming the mindsets of people from an analogue, highly structured, sequential, and referential to a more specific, vague, global, and highly holistic mindset. Online interactions also tend to change the different experiences of internet users since the different aspects of internet or digital media bring closer all distant features and move away elements or things that seem closer (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

Morata (2020) indicates that online interactions through social media only provides a depiction of the world but does not bring out the true reality of the world itself. In this case the internet based interactions convey the world presence without the actual dimensions of time and space or environment. This makes the different engagements done online very simultaneous and highly momentary as compared to face to face interactions. The need to acquire knowledge or information about essential aspects of the modern age is one of the most important things that force people to engage in online interactions. The use of the internet has greatly improved

the pace of knowledge acquisition since it is associated with fast dissemination or transfer of information from one source to several users in the shortest time possible (Berg et al., 2017; Riva et al., 2016). People are able to generate answers to different questions with the use of online communication. However, most scholars argue that the increased reliance on the internet for different solutions to both complex and simple questions has greatly affected the intermediate stage of excitement involved in searching for such solutions. Furthermore the increase in the use of online platforms for communication has reduced the level of patience, the ability to face frustrations, and the desire to reestablish alternative strategies in case of new challenges or problems that need alternative solutions (Herman & Collins, 2018; Wang & Wang, 2011).

Scholars such as Umberto Galimberti argue that emotional development among the young has greatly devalued with the increase in the use of the internet for communication (Competence & Maturity, 2010). Most young people are malnourished in terms of emotional competences whereby they are much overwhelmed by the various experiences at early stages of childhood that they cannot easily process all because of increased internet use. Online communication via social media platforms has improved the skills of people concerning fast responses but has failed to enhance the ability to think or reflect deeply about complex problems(Competence & Maturity, 2010; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Galimberti claims that inability to reflect deeply and high level of emotivity may result in several emotional deficiencies such as high apathy for emotional apparatus such as addiction to drugs, love for violence, and high level of creativity incase an individual has self-discipline (Competence & Maturity, 2010). Generally online communication and other aspects of social media or digital media greatly influence the emotional development of children in several ways but most especially on their attitude towards different life situations. Internet use has increased the tendency of people especially the young, to expect instant gratification of their different needs and quick fulfilment of their demands or wishes. This can be dangerous in the long run especially when such needs or wishes are not fulfilled or met on time (Riva et al., 2016; Valkenburg & Taylor Piotrowski, 2017).

2.1.3.   Moral competences

The moral development of any internet user is greatly dependent on their ability to accord equal rights to other internet users. In this case young internet users should be in position to acknowledge the fact the other person is also capable of offering highly valuable or reasonable thoughts during any online communication between two or more people. A moral personality is very instrumental in making different essential decisions whereby internet users with a high personality are able to undertake decisions in an autonomous, reasonable, and very responsible manner(Zych et al., 2018).

Lee (2009) indicates that human behavior or character does not result from external impulses but rather from an individual's internal contemplation. A high moral personality is considered a great influencer of an individual's actions in society. People with a great personality are always in position to account for their actions in society as compared to individuals with a poor personality. Similarly the increased use on online communication has greatly affected the personalities of most young internet users especially concerning respect for elders, leaders and fellow internet users (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016).

There is a great internal connection or relationship between moral development and social or emotional development of an individual. In this case, an impact rendered on moral competence by online communication also doubly affects the emotional and social competences of individuals. The overall prerequisite or requirement for any moral decisions undertaken by individuals during online communications is based on one's level of social sensitivity and emotional maturity (Brady et al., 2017; Zych et al., 2018). Moral decisions are always considered sensible and tend to transcend different bare impulses and consequently involve other people as equals. Research also indicates that moral decisions focus on the irreplaceable role of an essential subject or element of focus(Riva et al., 2016). Furthermore the different moral decisions undertaken by internet users tend to focus on self-satisfaction without considering the wellbeing of others. This is mostly common among young internet users who are highly egocentric and have no ethical values of relating with people virtually through online communications (Bonetti et al., 2010).

Most children or young people using the internet are fond of progressively developing their ability of moral thinking and action based on the knowledge or information they access from the different interactions conducted online. The young are always keen to decide what is good for them though it is advisable that they seek guidance from the old concerning the authenticity of some of the information or data shared online. At the stage of puberty, the acceptable price among different peers is majorly to forgo different online based desires for the general benefit of the common good(van den Eijnden et al., 2008). At a later life, most peers start to acknowledge the importance of sacrificing different desires for the enhancement of morality in society. This enables peers to continuously integrate different essential social norms into their daily communication with other pears on the different virtual or digital communication platforms (Berg et al., 2017; Morata, 2020).

The digital world though the different online communication platforms has the ability to restructure both family ties and social life dynamics which impacts moral development in the long run. A critical assessment of the impact of internet use on the level of social ethics among users, then it can be concluded that the digital age has greatly influenced the general development of morals among people (Berg et al., 2017; Kalogiannidis et al., 2022; Chatzitheodoridis et al.,2020). This also has a great impact on people's ways of living in any community or society. Increased use of

online communication has eased knowledge accessibility and sharing between across the world. Online communication has also the exchange of intercultural norms and consequently enhanced cooperation of individuals involved in similar or common projects across the world. However, this has increased the complexity involved in protecting intellectual property thereby increasing the cases of plagiarism. The issue of intellectual property is very challenging in the digital age since most students and adults are tempted to use works of other people without obtaining the rightful permission (García et al., 2020; Morata, 2020).

Ethical pluralism has also become a challenging issue with the increased use of online communication in the modern society. The interconnection between different global cultures and the sharing of knowledge or views has allowed people to encounter other ethical values or traditions(Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Kontogeorgos et al.,2016). Adopting norms or values of other cultures affects the moral competence of the internet user since most of them fail to balance between their own traditions and those of other cultures. In this case most internet users, especially the young have failed to align personal traditions with cultures as a way of establishing a common ethical ground of coexisting with other cultures in the internet or virtual world. The fact is that there are no ethical norms or values that are accepted globally hence focus should be directed on establishing a global foundation of ethics as a way of enhancing moral development among intenerate users (Umeogu & Ojiakor, 2014; Kalogiannidis et al., 2021).

3. Methods

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design that involved using an online survey questionnaire to collect data from different participants selected from the different social media platforms particularly Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and Instagram. The study employed probability sampling techniques whereby a simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the different study participants. The reason for using the different subscribers of the different social media platforms was because they possess enough knowledge on how online communication has influenced the social, emotional, and moral competences of internet users. A total sample size of 155 participants randomly selected from the target population of the different subscribers of the different online communication platforms. Data collection was conducted by availing the survey questionnaire through an online data collection platform (Survey monkey) that involved engaging with the targeted sample size of participants. The questionnaire was mostly composed of open ended questions hence the study was much dependent on qualitative data. Data collected was analyzed using content analysis and the interpretation of the results was done through a narrative firm of presentation where direct quotes from participants were included in explaining results(Chatzitheodoridis et al.,2020; Kontogeorgos et al.,2017).

4. Results

The data collected through an online survey from the different young people using online communication were analyzed and the results are presented and consequently interpreted as shown below.

Demographic information

Table 1: Demographic information of participants.

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	84	54.2
Female	71	45.8
Age		
15-20 years	13	8.4
21-26 years	67	43.2
27-31 years	41	26.5
32 years and above	34	21.9
Commonly used social media platform		
Twitter	31	20.0
Whatsapp	34	21.9
Facebook	43	27.7
Instagram	26	16.8
Others	22	14.2
Duration of online communication use		
Daily	129	83.2
A few days in a week	24	15.5
Once a month	2	1.3
Once a year	0	0
Total	155	100

Source: Survey (2021).

The results presented in table 1 clearly indicate that the majority of the participants were males (54.2%) whereas the rest were females (45.8%). The largest number of participants were in the age bracket of 21-26 years (43.2%) and the least number of respondents were in the age bracket of 15-20 years (8.4%). The respondents also identified Facebook as the most commonly used social media platform (27.7%) followed by Whatsapp (21.9%), Twitter (20%), Instagram (16.8%) and others (14.2%). Majority of the respondents indicated that they engage in online communication daily (83.2%), followed by those who communicate for a few days in a week (15.5%) and others once a month (1.3%).

Analyzing online or communication and social, emotional and moral competences

The study was aimed at assessing the level to which online communication influences social competences and the results obtained based on the responses from participants are presented in figure 1.
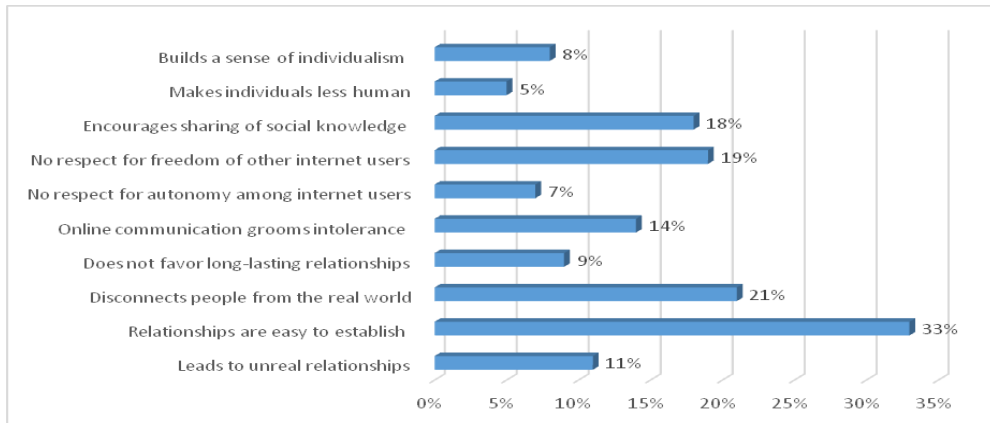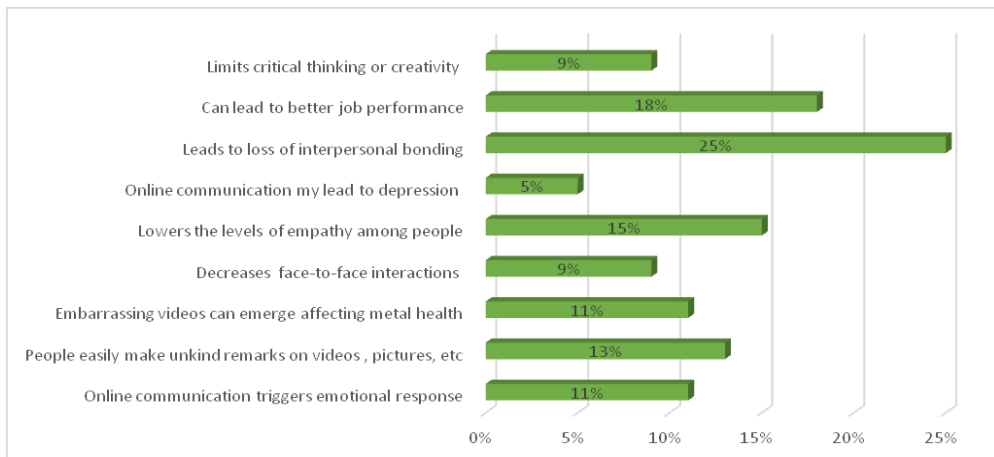

Source: Survey (2021).

Several potential implications on social competences were aroused by the participants and the key points are presented in figure 1. A great number of respondents indicated that online communication is associated with easy establishment of relationships (33%) indicating that most people have been able to engage in different forms of social bonding or relationships with increased online communications. Other key issues raised included that; online communications does not favor long-lasting relationships and that relationships are unreal. One respondent indicated that; *A person is able to form all sorts of friendship on social media in the shortest time possible but these relationships do not last long as they are formed on fake bonds.*

Participants also argued that reliance on virtual communication tends to disconnect people from the real world, does not favor long-lasting relationships, grooms intolerance, and there is always no respect for autonomy among internet users. However the participants hinted on the fact that online communication encourages sharing of knowledge. One participant indicated that; *I have been able to create several friends on Facebook who we share knowledge about different academic disciplines. Health relationships on social media are very important for global development since they enable people from different cultural backgrounds to share knowledge.* The increase in the nature of unreal relationships is attributed to the fact that people no longer get involved in face to face mode of communication due to increase in the use of mobile phones. Every person is much interested in communicating with mobile phones hence the tradition of communicating in person or face to face is gradually decreasing.
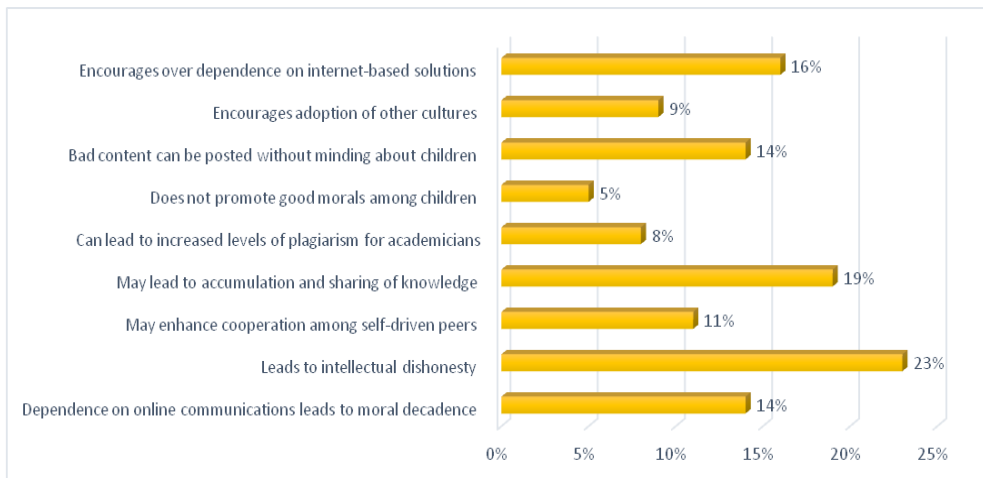
Emotional implications

Source: Survey (2021)

The results in figure 2 clearly show that online communications may lead to loss of interpersonal bonding (25%). This is majorly due to the lack of face to face communication whereby people are not able to have a physical touch or contact with each other to form stronger bonds.

One respondent wrote: *We are basically in a world that no longer cares for strong bonds. The increase in use of social media for communication no longer allows people to establish very strong bonds together.*

Respondents also revealed that increased use of online communication has affected the level of critical thinking and creativity among people. People are now not willing to think deep and generate solutions by themselves. Furthermore participants indicated that the level of patience and ability to wait has reduced whereby individuals expect quick things as they are used to finding everything on the internet. *The different technological advancements that have led to an increase in the number of internet users especially social media has greatly affected the patience levels of individuals. People now expect quick things since they are used to getting quick solutions from the internet.*

Moral implications

Horizontal bar chart titled "Moral implications" with the following values:
- Encourages over dependence on internet-based solutions: 16%
- Encourages adoption of other cultures: 9%
- Bad content can be posted without minding about children: 14%
- Does not promote good morals among children: 5%
- Can lead to increased levels of plagiarism for academicians: 8%
- May lead to accumulation and sharing of knowledge: 19%
- May enhance cooperation among self-driven peers: 11%
- Leads to intellectual dishonesty: 23%
- Dependence on online communications leads to moral decadence: 14%

Source: Survey (2021)

Concerning online communication and moral competences, participants noted that there is increased intellectual dishonesty due to reliance on the internet for academic solutions (23%). One respondent indicated: *Whereas most students admit to relying on copy and paste from the internet, most students are greatly dependent on the different answers provided on the internet and most of them have gone ahead to use confidential or restricted data of other scholars without their consent. This leads to violation of intellectual property rights.* Relatedly participants confirmed that the increased reliance on online communication to obtain answers for complex solutions has led to high levels of plagiarism among academicians most especially the young students.

5. Discussion

The findings for the current study clearly confirm the influence of online communication on the social, moral and emotional capabilities or competences of the different users of the internet. Despite the relevance of social networking through online platforms, online communication tends to negatively impact the general wellbeing of an individual, especially the young. Online communications or interactions are associated with several social based competences or implications majorly due to the diversity in cultural and behavioral trust of people involved in online interactions. Best et al. (2014) indicates that communication through emails, social media, websites, or mobile phones, helps different peer groups to share knowledge or experiences concerning different social dimensions. The study clearly revealed that online interactions can help in knowledge sharing which is essential for emotional development. These interactions are always executed at a relatively lower cost since the general cost of internet has gradually reduced majorly due to different

advancements in technology that have enabled internet providers to find cheaper ways of delivering services to internet users. However over reliance on on-line interactions for knowledge has had a very big impact on intellectual property. In this case most students tend to use the works of other people without their consent. This has greatly affected the moral wellbeing of most students (Brady et al., 2017; Kolucki & Lemish, 2011; Kalogiannidis et al., 2022).Despite the ability of online communications to virtually bring closer different groups of friends and families, scholars argue that over dependence on online communication affects the social life of individuals. Morata (2020) argues that most youth who are addicted to interactions such as Facebook tend to feel depressed when they cannot locate time for such a communication. The results have revealed that the young people no longer involve in face to face communications but spend much time virtually engaging with other people on different online communication platforms such as Twitter, Skype, Snapchat, Instagram, Whatsapp, and Facebook, among others. Generally the dependence or over reliance on online interactions greatly affects the humanity aspects of the users. In this case, it renders several implications on the normal life structure or social well-being of the online users (Lee, 2009; Umeogu & Ojiakor, 2014).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study confirms the impact of online communication on the general social, emotional and moral competences of the different users especially the young children. The study confirms that the increase in the use of the internet has greatly affected the strength of social relationships between different groups of people and also supports the business communications. In this case, most young people are no longer attached to the real world but are greatly attracted by the perceived realities of the virtual world. Based on the fact that the different aspects of digital or social media affect the social, emotional and moral wellbeing of users especially the young, it is advisable that educational institutions, parents or caretakers of internet users focus on promoting self-respect among young internet users. This should be in addition to enhancing the emotional development, community affiliation, creativity, and innovation of the different young people involved in online interactions.

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