

Chapter 9

Maintaining Relationships Through Social Media and the Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of social media in our global political, social, and business landscape. It underscores the argument that the value of social media in our 21st century social and business life-styles cannot be overlooked. It explores some of the ways in which social media has shaped and positively maintained friendship, dating, and family relationships. It also highlights some of the growing challenges and emerging moral risks associated with unregulated social media prevalence in the society and offers ways to minimize threats posed by unfettered social media use in the society.

INTRODUCTION

Background of Social Media Communication

The concept of social media has assumed greater influence and legitimacy in our 21st century global communication. It has become ubiquitous in our everyday communication, business interactions and an important aspect of our everyday life. The advancement of social media has created a new paradigm that influences every aspect of society from communication with each other, dating, spiritual, retail, education, appointments, and nearly every aspect of one's life has been affected by social media. The growth of social media across the global socio-political and business landscape has influenced every aspect of

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our dating and relationship lifestyle. In fact, it has facilitated instant communication and exchange of information globally. Specifically, it has facilitated easier access to information and enhanced communication across a broader spectrum of our socio-cultural lifestyle. It is a form of online communication platform that facilitates common interactions among diverse groups of individuals and communities (Kunz & Hackworth, 2011). Beyond the sharing of information and communication online, social media has a far-reaching impact on our 21st century society because of the increasing trend at which relationships are developed and formed. The interactions that occur on social media is primarily the result of the relationships that exist among families, friends, and work colleagues.

The capacity to foster online communication that goes beyond geographical boundaries is a major driver of social media's defining influence on relationships among individuals and communities. Social media interaction has been argued to be the most common and fastest means to developing and fostering long - distance relationships, which often overlook the cultural and geographical barriers. Over the past decade, most social relationships in the realm of politics, business and personal interactions have often been channelled by means of a social media communication (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011).

Since the launch of Facebook and Twitter in the first decade of the 21st century, there has been a steady increase in new social media sites such as Foursquare, Spotify, Tumblr, Instagram, snapchat, twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Vine and WhatsApp. Current social media sites have been created to meet the need of online dating and making friends based on an individual's social and career interest. "Social media has come to deeply penetrate our lives: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and many other platforms define many of our daily habits of communication and creative production" (Van Dijck, 2013). Van Dijck argues that "culture of connectivity" and terms like "friending", "trending" and "sharing" have taken on different meanings in our social media culture.

How Social Media Has Positively Influenced the Society

This chapter argues that social media communication has created a world of instant information dissemination and progressively contributed to deepening intercultural understanding, dialogue, and relationship on a global scope. It is an undeniable fact that social media interaction is the driving force in our rapid social, economic, technological and religious changes. It has offered individual citizens, marginalized groups and local communities the authority to assemble, relate constructively to each other and make free speech a collaborative global media networking. This process has truly encouraged active citizen participations in their civil responsibilities and the democratic processes of their countries. Furthermore, users' ability to actively participate and respond instantaneously to occurring events signify a future where culture differences are respected, because it drives users' initiatives to consider other worldviews. The presence of social media has also created avenues for family members to share their special occasions, joy, success stories, annual life events on common social media platforms and networking. Specifically, the ability of social media to enhance delivery of information and promote effective communication is supported by the need for relationships among individuals.

Notably, social media has also become a tool for fostering relationships and mobilizing political uprising in many countries across many parts of the world (Wiest, 2011). Through social media networking, citizens across different parts of the globe have organised protests against unpopular economic policies. Presently in many sub-Saharan countries, citizens have mobilized themselves through a common bond of relationship to protect high cost of living and political suppression of civil liberties by their government. For example, through Facebook messages, some political activists in numerous Middle Eastern

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