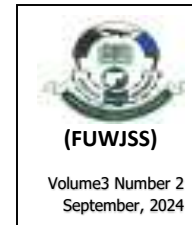# SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE COLONIZATION OF THE *LIFEWORLD*

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of the social media in the social life of individuals. Through a systematic review of secondary sources, this study provides a narrative on how the social media has colonized the lifeworld of members of the society to the extent that information and news from or on the platform are consumed without being subjected to critical thinking. The obsession with the social media through its numerous platforms such as facebook, whatsapp, twitter (X), YouTube, instagram and snapchat has attracted the presence of politicians, entrepreneurs, marketers and every class of people to it, as everyone remains glued to their social networks for entertainment and information. The paper shows that the controlling influences of the social media over the lives of people have made it a convenient platform for the dissemination of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. The consequence is that social life, expressed in the lived experiences of individuals, has become the victim of the social media.

Keywords: Social media, *lifeworld*, social life, colonization, victim

Introduction

The lifeworld represents our social life (activities, experiences, relationships and interactions), and it is made up of culture, personality and society. The ravaging effects of the social media in effecting social change in our societies have been quite massive in our ever increasingly globalized and post-modernized world, as members of society value the social media as means of staying in touch with one another and source of news or information on many topics including sports, politics, fashion, religion, et cetera. Aaker and Smith

(2010) have emphasized how the power of the social media has been used to drive social change and achieve social progress across every strata of human society. Similarly, Brian and Adam (2017) have shown how the social media have changed the institutions and structural relationships that exist in societies in the post-modern era. They demonstrated in their work on how the social media profoundly changed the way individuals have thought about and practiced leadership, emphasizing the decisive influences of leadership, of elite social roles, and of group global structure to the overall success and stability of large social media projects. A good example here is the manner in which Donald Trump has redefined presidential communication using the twitter to break bureaucratic norms of official communication. The same situation is applicable to the use of the social media to colonize democratic politics, both for the good and the bad reasons. Thus, politicians and other political institutions rely heavily on the social media to convey their messages to their audiences, whether real or fake, knowing that the social media has become a sure means of getting messages across the masses, with little or no risk of being censored.

Globalization and Transformations in Information Communication Technologies

The reality of our globalized world has been made possible with the transformations that have taken place in the information and communications technology. Isachenko (2018) emphasized the transformative role that the information and communications technologies have had on the perceptions and lifestyles of people in modern societies. This view corroborates the perspective of Buhalis and O'Connor (2005) who argued that information and communication technology have revolutionalized the tourist sector in many societies, as individuals who have encountered places on social media become interested and motivated to visit such places. Besides, through the internet and social media platforms, prospective tourists ask questions concerning the experiences of those who have been to such tourist sites in the context of cost, security and climate.

Khizbullin et al (2017:1) has argued that the information age which has been transformed by the revolutionary power of the information and communication technology poses serious threats to societies, especially when the information reaches unintended targets. The argument here is that information could be disadvantageous to

societies in the forms of "creation of virtual worlds that replace reality; manipulation of consciousness and behaviour of people; substitution of purposes, values and way of life with externally imposed standards; information distortion".

Valentine (2006) has evaluated the role of the social media, leveraging on the information and communication technology, and concluded that the relationships have become a globalized phenomenon where friendships and interactions across the globe have become heightened and deepened, including leading to marriages and migrations. Similarly, Nawi et al (2012) have also explained how the social media and the information and communication technology have influenced Islamic education. This reality explains the convergence among the peoples of the world irrespective of race, religion, and social class. Hence, access to other societies' patterns of dressing, food, music, and ideologies have become possible and in some cases resulted in xenocentric behaviours and attitudes.

Theoretical Framework

The network effect theory best explains the domineering influence of the social media on people, as virtually every human activity today, whether formal or informal: politics, business, social, religious and many other activities are facilitated by the social media. Also, the increasing number of people who use the social media for almost every human activity has made the social media so influential and fun-filled, in addition to the speed of access to millions of people, and the affordability of its usage to access and disseminate information across the globe. In addition, the network effect theory helps us understand how engaging the social media has become so that people are endeared and affectionately attached to the engaging contents of the social media. Thus, Swann (2002) emphasized the importance of the network effect in understanding the aggregate value (across all members of the network) that users of the social media enjoy.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study undertaken to examine the influence of the social media on the lived experiences of people using secondary data. The data were derived from academic and online sources.

Social Media Engagement and the Colonization of *Lifeworlds*

The increasing use of the social media as a tool for validating or invalidating social activities has attracted the attention of scholars. Hence, social media engagement which has to do with the measure of the various interactions with social media contents have become very important metrics in gauging the acceptance and feelings of audience towards the information being passed. These engagements are feedbacks from consumers of messages that would help the interaction two-sided rather than a one-way communication. The social media engagements include likes, comments, shares, comments, hashtags, and many other engagement tools.

Creating and sharing valuable or topical contents is a major way that social media influencers increase social media engagement (Dolan et al, 2016). Also, being authentic, consistent and posting valuable or controversial contents have been found to contribute to building engagement with large audience on social media.

Ching-Hua Ho & Yi-Hsuen Cho (2021) explored the lived experiences of new mothers with young children in Taiwan, and concluded that the social media provides new mothers the platform for interaction so as to gain a sense of belonging, and for personal leisure. This view is in line with the argument of Dessart (2016) who believed that the extent of engagement with social media can best be understood from the dimensions of an individual's affective, cognitive and behavioural dispositions, such that when an individual is emotionally attached to (or has substantial knowledge of) the topic of discussion, there will be increase in engagement, and when there is little or no attachment or knowledge of the content, then, engagement rate would be low. This explains the high rate of engagement in football and other sports, religious posts and ethno-religious conversations. Thus, interest and competence on the subject of conversation are important in fostering social media engagements.
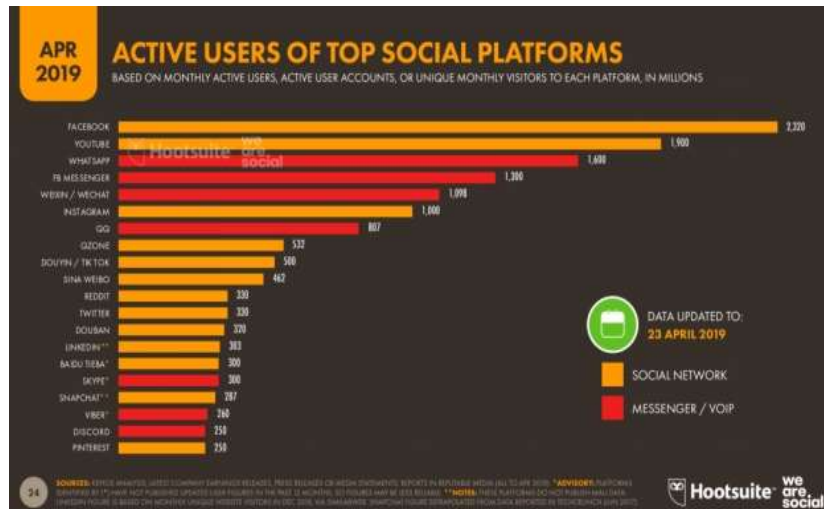
A total of 20 social media platforms now have 200 million or more monthly active users*:

1. Facebook has **2.85 billion** monthly active users.
2. YouTube has **1.90 billion** monthly active users.
3. WhatsApp has **1.50 billion** monthly active users.
4. Facebook Messenger has **1.30 billion** monthly active users.
5. WeChat (Weixin) has **1.10 billion** monthly active users.
6. Instagram has **1 billion** monthly active users.
7. QQ has **807 million** monthly active users.
8. QZone has **532 million** monthly active users.
9. TikTok (Douyin) has **500 million** monthly active users.
10. SinaWeibo has **462 million** monthly active users.
11. Reddit has **330 million** monthly active users.
12. Twitter has **330 million** monthly active users.
13. LinkedIn[2] has approximately **300 million** monthly active users.
14. Baidu Tieba[1] has **300 million** monthly active users.
15. Skype[1] has **300 million** monthly active users.
16. Snapchat[3] has roughly **287 million** monthly active users.
17. Viber[1] has **260 million** monthly active users.
18. Pinterest has **250 million** monthly active users.
19. Discord has **250 million** monthly active users
20. Telegram has **200 million** monthly active users.

Source: data reportal (https://datareportal.com/social-media-users)

Freitas and Smith (2017) have shown how the social media has dominated the lifeworld of young people in our societies. They

emphasized the role of social media in the lives of youngsters in the context of sexting, cyberbullying, and narcissism. The consequence, they argued, is that each day seems to bring another shocking tale of private pictures getting into the wrong hands, or a lament that young people feel compelled to share their each and every thought with the entire world. In fact, the reality is that the social media, with the advent of smart phones, have created a generation of self-obsessed egomaniacs.

Freitas and Smith ingeniously linked the social media to being the source and consequences of happiness and hate, hope and frustration. Drawing on a large-scale survey and interviews with students on thirteen college campuses, they explain that what young people are overwhelmingly concerned with--what they really want to talk about--is happiness. They argue thus:

They face enormous pressure to look perfect online--not just happy, but blissful, ecstatic, and fabulously successful. Unable to achieve this impossible standard, they are anxious about letting the less-than-perfect parts of themselves become public. Far from wanting to share everything, they are brutally selective when it comes to curating their personal profiles, and worry obsessively that they might unwittingly post something that could come back to haunt them later in life. Through candid conversations with young people from diverse backgrounds, Freitas and Smith (2017) reveals how even the well-adjusted individuals can be stricken by self-doubt when they compare their experiences with the vast collective utopia that they see online.

The realities of modernity and globalization have demystified the uniqueness of cultures. However, that seemingly utopian idea have been reified by the effect of the social media on the social life of societies across the globe, as the lifeworld of people, both at the urban and rural dwellings, become colonized by the social media. Social media has helped 'network' society in all aspects of social life (Blossom, 2009).

Rajagopal (2013) has also researched into the role of the social media in changing the business world. He argued that the social media creates the platform for businesses to analyze the corporate involvement towards strategic and tactical stewardship in serving customer-centric business requirements. He also emphasized the role of the social media through the various social networks in the formation of the communication grapevine. The grapevine effect is

contributed to by the social media through word-of-mouth that stretches throughout the market irrespective of the various measures taken by firms to build their brand and competitive posture. There are many types of grapevines that are developed in various niches which stem from emotion, sensitivity, personality, assumptions, experiences, and social conventions.

Scholars have also shown concerns with the negative impact of social media especially in the areas of fake news, addiction to social networking sites, and the use of the social media to commit all types of atrocities. Hence, authorities as well as individuals have shown concern on how to resist the psychological and behavioral manipulation of social media. Harrison (2017) warned that at a time when the news cycle turns on a tweet, journalism gets confused with opinion, and facts are treated as negotiable information, applying critical thinking skills to one's social media consumption is more important than ever. Harrison explores the implications of having digital "friends" and the effects on mood, self-esteem, and the cultivation of friendship in the real world. He discusses how social media affects attention spans and the ability to consider issues in depth. And he suggests ways to protect oneself against privacy invasion, cyberstalking, biased misinformation, catfishing, trolls, misuse of photos, and the confusion over fake news versus credible journalism. Harrison (2009) also showed how the social media operates in such a manner that does not allow its consumers to evaluate and subject information on the social media to critical thinking before they are believed, acted upon or even shared to others. He further argues that social media reinforces people's biases, clouds their judgments with images that leave a false impression, and fills the brain with anecdotes that become cheap substitutes for objective data. The consequence of this misguided decision on the basis of social media trickery is that misinformation, pseudoscience, fraud, propaganda and irrational ideas have pervaded our societies. For example, during the Covid-19 period, people came across different news that were believed and acted upon without being verified or even subjected to common sense. One of such consequences was reported by the World Health Organization (2020) when it said that "in the first 3 months of 2020, nearly 6 000 people around the globe were hospitalized because of corona virus misinformation. During this period, researchers say at least 800 people may have died due to misinformation related to COVID-19".

Conclusion and Recommendation

The social media have become means through which the local lifeworld of people is defined, occupied and dominated. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, individuals have their lives controlled by the social media, such that the interests, values, roles, norms, customs, beliefs, relationships and interactions of people have been altered, shaped or reshaped by the influence of the social media through its numerous platforms. This situation explains the dynamics affecting our lifeworld. It is recommended that social media users make deliberate effort to subject information on social media to factual checks before consuming or disseminating such information. It is also important that individuals prioritize their activities and adopt a disciplined approach to the use of the social media so as to avoid skipping other important activities in their daily lives because of the domineering influence and obsession with social media and its numerous platforms.

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