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Information Technology-Induced Anonymity, Social Interaction and Web Ethics In Nigeria: An Investigation into Factor Interplay

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ABSTRACT

As internet usage continue to expand and advance, social interaction which is the primary vehicle through which advancement of ICT affects socio-economic outcomes has remained one of the most popular engagements on the world wide web. However, the perceived anonymity of on-line interactions diminishes the sense of responsibility that is experienced when communication occurs in-person.   Although anonymity is characterized as the essence of users' privacy,   the perceptions of anonymity online provides a means for invasion of privacy (Saldarini & Roberts, 2003).   Using a self-designed research instrument titled "ICT-Induced Anonymity and Its Impact of Social Interactions in Nigeria", data was gathered and analysed. Results from the analysis of empirical data revealed that While most users are aware of the anonymity problem, without accurate data the degree of the problem has been unknown. This has hampered the primary attempts to convince users of the effect of ICT-Induced anonymity. The paper concludes by proffering possible solutions to ethical menace pervading social interaction on the internet.

Key words: Keywords: ICTs, Anonimity, Social Interraction, Nigeria, Internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars have muted that the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution comes with two faces viz: desegregation and minority-majority earning inequality. It has also come with a sense of anonymity, which has adverse effect on our day-to-day communication and in part encourages unethical behaviors of users on the internet *((Martin, 2005)* Although empirical data about unethical social usage and ethics are gradually evolving, the impact such usage will have on the disorganization of primary societies are very rife in some quarters.

Anonymity has been an aid to most crimes perpetrated on the Internet (Longe et al, 2007). With the increasing use of ICT facilities such as the Internet, Mobile phones and other ubiquitous technologies for social interaction in an age where ICT diffusion has become astronomical, research is warranted on how the factor of anonymity interplays with other factors such as access, maturity, age, gender and other constructs to influence ethical conduct online viz-a-viz how they impact on social economic development (Longe & Longe, 2005).

Communicating with the Internet varies from traditional medium of communication in many ways. The Internet usually offers a highly individualized means of communicating as opposed to more collective forms. A traditional village gathering seems very far removed from communicative practices prevalent on the Net. (Hampton & Wellman, 2000). Second, the interaction is computer mediated as opposed to face-to-face, shaped by the technical tools used. Despite the fact that they create new forms of interactions, online tools are also said to be restrictive when compared to the richness of face-to-face interaction (Paula, 2007). The removal from the immediate social environment and conventional forms of communication poses a danger that replace human contact thus leading to social alienation.

This problem is also now being magnified in medical circles. (Longsdon et al, 2009; Hildén & Honkasalo, Marja-Liisa, 2006). Internet interaction   is therefore assuming an impersonal mode that is more virtual rather than real.

2. RESEARCH DIRECTION

Across all the tribes represented in Nigeria and Africa in general, we had forefathers who gave young ones informal/traditional education to prepare them for life and teach them how to comport themselves in public and private communication. The culture and perception of technology can be shaped from the rate of adoption of ICTs. More importantly however, this culture determines the pervasiveness and the use of ICTs in the everyday lives of people in society. Therefore, this is factor that has an important impact on the adoption potential of ICTs in the everyday life. The internet has however present an uncensored platform where gross usage of languages and disorderliness among different age groups, fuelled by the claim of urbanization, modernization, spurious sexual expressions in junk magazines and of course libelious pronouncements has become the order ofbthe day (Wallace, 1999; Fandy, 2000).

The consequences are not far fetched. They include violence, conflicts, hate, tension in relationships and summarily, promotion of unethical behaviors and inappropriate communication trend among users (Longe et al, 2007). This study looks at how ICT advancement has negatively impacted on the efficiency of social interaction in ethically integrated social. The disorganization of primary societies, and resort to urban life, with its attendant loss of rich cultural values has encroached on society's ability to handle the use of social platforms ethically.

We define unethical use for this research as conducts that borders around the following use of language:

(1)   Use of abusive languages
(2)   Hate speech
(3)   Vulgar languages
(4)   Inciting statements
(5)   Gender bias statements
(6)   Inflamed religious communication
(7)   Obnoxious postings and uploads of pictures and photograpghs
(8)   Use of sexually explicit languages

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research sets out to study is to investigate the impact of the factor on anonymity on unethical online communication. A self-designed research instrument titled "ICT-Induced Anonimty and Its Impact of Social Interractions in Nigeria", constitute the tool for gathering data across different strata of internet user for the research. Our study is limited to internet users in Ibadan Metropolic, Nigeria

3.1 Study Population

The research population consist of undergraduate and post graduate students of the University of Ibadan and other adult internet users. Chuildren and the underage were excluded. The work is also limited to internet access on various ICT tools including mobile phones, black berrysm, IPad, IPod etc. Other usage for text and pictures were not considered. A total of 271 questionnaires were distributed out of which 200 were selected for satisfying stratification for Age, Gender, Educational level and length of usage of internet.

3.2 Sampling Technique

The sampling technique used in this research work is the stratified sampling method in combination with simple random sampling. The simple random sampling technique is a method employed in selecting a sample of considerate size from a given population of data used in the survey. Administration of Instrument. The research instrument was administered by the researcher and a group of research assistant and distributed to respondent's internet users in Ibadan, Nigeria.

3.3 Formulation Of Hypothesis

To guide the research and data analysis, a null hypothesis was formulated thus:

H_{10}: There is no significant relationship between perceived anonymity on the internet and unethical communication among male and female users online

H_{20}:   There is no significant relationship between perceived anonymity on the internet and unethical communication among the generality of internet users

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Means scores and the standard deviation of gathered data were determined. The t-test statistics was then used to determine whether there is significant difference between the mean scores of the identified factor (anonymity).

Table 1
Comparison of the female and male mean responses for analysis.

SEX	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	N	X	Sd	t-cal	t-tab	df
FEMALE	100	6.7	5.7	29	2.69		100	18.7	6.3	N.S. 3.0	2.18	
MALE	100	10.77	3.4			2.04	100	20.68	3.5			28

P< 0.05 Level   NS: Not significant   **: Significant.

In Table 1 the results of the t-test statistics carried out on these means scores indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean value of responses of the female and male respondents. Hence, hypothesis 1 is retained. This implies that gender does not really have impact on how anonymity is perceived as influencing unethical communication online.

Table 2
Comparison of General mean responses for the population

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	N	Df	t-cal	t-Critical
	X	SD	N	DF		
Positive Response	14.57	3.6	30	58	** 9.8.0	2.04
Negative Responses	23.6	3.2	30			

Ns – Not significant   **- Significant   Significant - at P < 0.05

In Table 2 the mean scores of combined responses, the t – test statistics carried out on these mean scores indicated that there is significant difference. The mean scores from the positive responses is greater than that of the other group. Hence, null hypothesis is rejected.

5. DISCUSSIONS

This study has shown that anonymity is generally perceived as negatively influencing ethical conducts in online communication. The results resonates with the findings of Saldarini & DeRobertics (2003) who concluded opined that ICT-induced anonymity tools has influenced and generated a "new self" that can no longer be ignored and that will continue to expand in the 21st century.   This is actually evidence by the growing mirage of obnoxious images, messages and information found online across the webs cape in the research area. To keep the internet safe for users and devoid of such negative communication, more will have to be done in the context of promoting ethical usage through enlightenement progaremme and through the presentation of data and cases on the negative impact such conducts have on the general well being of internet users.

6. DIRECTION FOR FUTURE WORKS

Future works will examine the pervasiveness of unethical graphic uploads in new and emerging ubiquitous ICT tools and evaluate its impact on bandwidth congestion in online scenario.

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Author's Brief

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