Are Social Media Design Practices Marginalising Other Cultures?

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Abstract

We argue that the current practice of social media design might have inadvertently 'othered' African cultures in place of stereotypical traditions and values that inform the practice of innovation globally. It is our understanding that sustainable and sensitive approaches that integrates with the aspirations and lived conditions of diverse marginalised communities ought to form the basis for the approaches used in understanding and designing social media platforms. We also emphasise the need to critically and sensibility analyse the socio-cultural implication of using mobile technologies and social platforms to the process of harnessing the social practices of the communities that they get adopted and use. It is our position that examining the multitude of Nigerian cultures and values might bring about a better understanding of the societal implications of 'Instagramming in Nigeria' and the use of mobile technologies in intimate spaces among married couples and adults in relationship.

Author Keywords

Pilot study; Instagram; Mobile Technologies; Intimate space.

Introduction

As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria is at the forefront of the African technological revolution. Although social media (social networking like Facebook, twitter and LinkedIn; media sharing like Snapchat and

Instagram; and social discussion like Reddit and Digg) can be addictive and radically misused and overused, the technological revolution has shown greater promises as to how social platforms can revitalise different aspect of marginalised communities. In Nigeria, the use of media sharing platforms like Instagram have been extensively used as a means for socialising [4, 10], microlearning [8], empowerment [2], entrepreneurship [7] and skill development [14]. With Nigeria consisting of culturally and religiously diverse population, as a research community, there is a limited understanding of how the thinking and design of social media platforms take into account the cultural values and norms of the transnational context they get used [11]. Often, the assumption is that technology is universal and value-free. However, research in HCI and persuasive computing has demonstrated how the design and use of tools influence and shape human behaviours and activities, either positively or negatively [12]. What might be considered value-free is indeed embedded and guided by certain assumptions and values, and thus can foster or hinder the physiological and psychological wellbeing and digital safety of users.

Problem Statement

The problem we seek to address relates to 'technology', 'people' and the 'societal implication' of mobile technologies to the sociological practices of diverse communities in Nigeria. The short paper reports on our initial thoughts and questioning about an exploratory project that focuses on broader issues brought forward by the increase penetration of mobile technologies in our everyday life. Out of the process came about we two distinctive and related stances with regards to the place of technology in Nigerian societies:

The first stance concerns the understanding of the trajectory of Instagram adopters (from non-user to user, misuser, and over-users) and how the pathway influence (positively or negatively) their wellbeing and digital safety. We sought to determine the factors the promote adopters' intention, attitude, behaviours, and perception across the different trajectories; and how the factors identified impact the societal values and traditions of community members.

The second stance we took concerns understanding the socio-cultural and bodily practice of using mobile technologies (smartphone, tablet, mobile games etc.) among married couples and adults in relationships. What we sought to outline is an adequate understanding of how the mobile penetrates domestic and intimate spaces; the power relations involved with and without the mobile; and on how it brings about either revitalising or destructing marital practices relevant to the cultural and religious sensitivities of Nigerians.

It is our belief that the two stances will bring about a socio-cultural practice of appropriating mobile technologies and social media platforms as tools for social networking and advancing context specific human sociality.

Research Context

The use of social media, specifically Instagram and Facebook have been associated with creating a community where people can share their experiences [13]. However, their usage has also been associated with all form of behavioural changes, in most cases people comparing their experience to that of others and thus creating a competitive sense of living that is not

guided by practical and rational reasoning. This can be considered a psychological issue in today's modern way of living. It is evident that social platforms have connected communities and brought about a higher degree of cultural integration and revitalisation of the African communal culture. Also, as an addictive and destructive tool, social platforms have begun to gradually demoralize, destabilize, and disintegrate certain cultural values that guide the ways of life of Nigerian communities, as across the globe.

In addition, research has also shown the influence of technology use and non-use [1, 15, 16], misuse and overuse [6] to the practice of design. Other studies have focused on the behavioural aspect of using social media and the impact (positive and negative) of such use on the personal and societal well-being and digital safety of people [5]. As an exploratory study, this work attempts at investigating the perspective of diverse group of Nigerians with regards to their experience of not using and using Instagram as a tool for socialising, learning, empowerment, and entrepreneurship. Some have examined the use of Instagram among Nigerian populations, showing varied gender perspective towards the activities of users [4, 10]. Findings form these studies suggest gender differentiation, and socio-cultural variation of use, specifically how males tend to 'follow' more people and appear more in captioned 'selfies' [4], while females tend to 'use' Instagram more often, have more followers than followings, and more likely to 'like' other people's post than comment on them [4, 10]. However, some of the indicators might be relational to the Nigerian cultures, particular where members are socially connected and where there is limited awareness on privacy and digital security issues associated with use. Among the few studies,

none has examined the perspectives of non-user and potential mis(over)users; or the trajectory of their non-user to user and to their potential misuse and overuse among Nigerians. We sought to examine such a fundamental gap across a diverse audience and determine how it might have altered the mentality of Nigeria's growing population towards practical and healthier ways of life. We also set to identify practical and preventive ways of discouraging the misuse and overuse, therefore outlining how just in time and adaptive behavioural interventions or social influences can be explored and incorporated into the design of social platforms.

With respect to technology domestication, research has begun to examine how people use technology in intimate spaces and its impact on psychological health and bodily practices; the power dynamics of the bed as an embodied and negotiated space; and on how such account influence sociality practices [9]. However, these ideas have not been investigated in the context of Africa, and Nigeria in particular. This work will explore and extend existing research in this area and with specific focus on Instagram.

Study Design

We adopt a multi-pronged methodological approach where various ideas about indigenous sensitivities with methods of data collection and analysis will be adopted. The project involves 3 phases. Phase 1 examined the present landscape of social media non-use and use across diverse audience using survey method. Phase 2 will be a fieldwork where we will collect quantitative data to better understanding the ideas from phase 1. This will be through interviews, interactive discussions and workshops with a range of people. To gain an in-

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depth understanding of how technology is penetrating domestic spaces and impacting relationships, we will engage married couples through a conversational approach to ethnography, and virtual group chat with young couples. We argue that engaging different stakeholders will provide diverse insight and perspective on how Instagram and broadly social platforms impact psychological well-being, digital safety, and cultural values and practices of Nigerians. Phase 3 will be the analysis of the data through a grounded approach to thematic analysis, and the use of statistical tools. We will practice some form of reflexivity, reciprocal engagement and relational accountability in writing, validation and dissemination.

Early Findings and Future Work

This work is an exploratory project that seeks to understand the impact of social platforms as a driver for communal integration and development. It also concerns the power dynamic of using mobile technologies in domestic and intimates' spaces among married couples and adults in relationship. Early findings, through piloting of the trajectory of non-use to use and misuse of Instagram by one of the authors, have shown how users often move from nonusers to misusers. The emotional trajectory shows how the prolong use of Instagram can lead to excessive misuse, change in lifestyle, psychological distress and anxiety, the vulnerability of one's digital identity. The pilot reflection provides insights that might suggest the relevance of the question posed, specifically in understanding how one's misuse and overuse can changes one's behaviour and activities, and which might either affect/support one's physiological and psychological wellbeing or increase/minimise one's identity theft risk.

In addition, one of the author's retrospective account of using a smartphone for social interaction, intimacy generation, and bodily bonding and sharing with their partner – physically and virtually – points to how the use of a smartphone in intimate spaces can either support/hinder one's sociality practice. It also points to the power dynamics of the bed as an embodied, unstable, and negotiated space where interaction – conflict, communication – argument, bonding – separation, and intimacy – hostility is generated. From the auto-piloting of the project, one can appreciate the significant importance of these ideas to our understanding of the mobile as a revolutionarily tool and also as a destructive apparatus that needed to be critically and sensibly examined. It also charts out a research agenda that provide insights that could inform the re-examination of the approaches and methods adopted for understanding and designing for culturally diverse communities. It is our hope that the insight to come out of the analysis will inform how context-specific behavioural change support mechanisms can be designed into Instagram as to influence reasonable adoption and use. Our account of the use of mobile technologies in domestic and intimate spaces will provide a different understanding concerning the sociological practices of non-western communities, and on how such an understanding might suggest to the overall place of technology in society.

As the debate concerning understanding other cultures for the purpose of design is one that will bring about examining the perspective of the 'in here' and the 'out there', so will the analysis of mobile technologies and social media across Nigeria. The contribution of this work will be two-fold. Societally, the understanding developed will point to how social platform

enhance/hinder psychological well-being, digital and communal safety, marital and bodily practices, and our understanding of mobile technologies. Technically, it will shed light on how the design and deployment of tools within the transnational context can take into account the socio-cultural values of its varied users. The challenges faced relate to the complexities of recruiting participants to pilot the use of social platform among couples, due mainly to socio-cultural sensitivities.

SDG's and HCI Across Border's

The work that this short paper reports is relational to SDG's call for promoting good health and wellbeing and also the creation strong institutions through the inclusion of the prospect of marginalised communities. We considered ourselves as interdisciplinary HCI research, each with varied but related research interest and experience. Our attendance will avail us new insight that will guide our research ideas and also contribute to the discussions about working within and across intersectional discourses and boundaries.

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