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# Inclusive Positionality: How HCI Brought us Together

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**Abstract**

This position paper documents the reasoning behind working together as interdisciplinary researchers thinking and investigating technological issues with and for the Nigerian population. It presents ideas that point to how our differences in positionalities, specifically cultural identity, gender, social values, religious beliefs, power relations, language and intellectual locale might influence and impact the practice of examining the social implications of mobile technologies and social platforms non-use, use, misuse and over-use to the psychological and physiological wellbeing and digital safety of different actors. We hope that our research and co-design practice would point to how differences in researchers and research participants values are negotiated and absorbed while providing inclusive and sustainable design insights.

**Author Keywords**

Nigeria; traditions; values; community; research; design.

**Introduction**

The field of HCI has for long advocated for the diversity of practices and the sensible inclusion of various ideas from different fields to the understanding of the implication of technology in society. This position paper reports of the research and design implications of our distinctive positionalities as interdisciplinary researchers thinking and exploring the wellbeing and safety implications of the non-use, use, misuse and overuse of mobile technologies in intimate spaces and Instagram among Nigerian

populations. Nigeria consists of socially, culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse population. This makes the hostile biasness and a deeply rotted intolerance (often not talked about) between ethnicities radically implanted into the research and design practices of a representative Nigerian context.

The first author identifies as a Muslim Male of Hausa/Fulani ethnicity, while the second author identifies as a Christian Female of Igbo ethnicity and the third author as a Christian Female of Yoruba ethnicity. Although we are of different ethnicity, religion, tradition, language, and histories, our diversity is one thing that unites us, as much as HCI attempts to homogenise varied cultures into the design. There is also the difference in power relations, as a combination of early career and experienced researcher(s), and how such position might influence our locale scholarship and understanding of working at the intersection of different research interest. The somewhat historical resentment between our ethnicity might have warranted our adequacy to examine some of these issues as we can bring about a more representative outlook of developing a 'Nigeria-centric' methodology for cross-cultural research and design.

With our broad range of research interest, experience and knowledge of what it entails to undertake HCI project, we attempt to show how intersectionality might have brought us together as researchers seeking to develop a better understanding of how design practices of social media platforms can include the different—and often in conflict with each other—traditions and values of our ethnicities. This is motivated by the shared understanding of how human values are embodied in computing [4], and how in turn the use of computer systems can either support integrating our communal values or destabilise them. This places technological tools at the verge of uniting us as inhabitants of different communities with shared concerns

or might even lead to an unwanted cultural partitioning and design alienation.

The central ideas of the project that the position paper draws from concerns exploring the trajectory of Instagram non-use, to use, to potential misuse and overuse among Nigerians. It also explores the societal implication –in the sense of fostering and disintegrating socio-cultural values and marital bodily traditions – of using mobile technologies in uncommon spaces among married couples and adults in relationship. The question we seek to answer is of how design implications can be identified from the diverse socio-cultural values in Nigeria that would bring about optimal and reasonable usage and thus discourage misuse and overuse. We argue that such insights might bring about developing interventional strategies that would not only take into account the values that people hold but also devise means of revitalising and diversifying socio-technical practices.

### **Context**

One might ask, what is HCI like as we enter 2020? How diverse and inclusivity has its methods and practice become? Has it achieved the needed sensitivity of becoming value centred? And much more question to reflect on. Such questions were asked by a group of researchers [4] that set out the terrain for new paradigms, and approaches that could bring about a better understanding of the embodiment of human values in computing. Such an ambition, thirteen years after, has fuelled rethinking our practice of designing, deploying and investigating the implications of digital technology to human society and vice versa. While we acknowledge such an ambition, what concerns us is how the variation of the social values we might uncover be embodied in the design of social media platforms that would foster a healthier and safer lifestyle. The question would be, which social values are to be considered and which are to be ignored? How can

their multiplicity be harmonised into the design of tools to be used by different Nigerian communities? And specifically, in communities that are tribally and religiously divided but knitted together by the commonality of colonial forces? These questions necessitate examining design issues through intersectional lenses, and which has been an ongoing concern in the field of HCI.

However, the studies of social media have often been characterised by a lot of misconceptions [5]. What the literature has shown is how its usage (as a socio-cultural object for interaction and a form of embodied activity) might bring about changes in intention, perception, and behaviour of user's (cultural, social, organisational, personal, positive and negative). While a lot of work concerning social media are about how the use of tools foster and hinders lifestyle [5], others have examined the implication of technology non-use in various social context [2]. The more recent of which is how non-use might be due to some form of social inequality and segregation [1]. The emphasis has been on the socio-technical nature and implication of social media on the sociality of communities [3]. What we are interested in is the way the multiplicity of human values, both user's and non-users can be embedded in the design of tools, and on how such a practice shape our understanding of technology.

For technology domestication, research has begun to examine the use of mobile technology in intimates' spaces [6], and what that might mean to the consideration of social media as a subjective cultural object that integrates and disintegrate human sociality [3]. As members of diverse ethnicities, our collective accounts can find passage into design processes. This work sits at the intersection of these conflicting arguments, examining the trajectory of non-use to overuse, as to develop generative insights that can inform futuristic design that encourages and support healthier and safer lifestyle among Nigerian. Also, it would point to how the re-design of social platforms can

incorporate marital, bodily, and intimate family values and traditions, and thus might bring about a means of revitalising them through social media.

### **Anticipated Sensitivities**

We will adopt a situated methodological approach, where qualitative and quantitative methods will be employed. The sensitivities to be practised will be from our understanding of the values and traditions embedded in our various communities, outlining the needed reflexivity and relationality of working on and within cross-cultures. We will employ methods that we deem relevant to the context of use, use local language and narratives accordingly, while also being considerate of the influence and impact (in power relation terms) of our conduct and community perspective to the overall objective of the project. For analysis, we will employ a grounded approach to thematic/statistical analysis, where the different data sets will be analysed separately and as a whole in order to identify common and conflicting ideas. This will be achieved through the categorisation of themes towards understanding;

- how certain values can frame our future research questions;
- how our distinctive cultural values shape the ways we understand design requirements;
- how to incorporate the distinctive values within, around, and at the end product of our designs;
- how our individual and collective values guide the evaluation, deployment and adoption of new tools in our various community;
- and how the variation of the values we uncover can be incorporated into a particular design approach that can be termed 'Nigeria-centric'.

Such sensitivities could show how differences are negotiated and absorbed into design practices, and which

might provide a relational account relevant to the context of Nigeria. Such a position warrants putting our historical differences and ethnic baggage's aside, bringing together the familiar and unfamiliar, the contested and the resented, and the divisive and the relative into design. We argue that it is through an intersectional concept of co-ideation and co-creation of design practices that context-specific social platforms can be developed.

### **Extending Research and Design Practice through the Multiplicity of Social Values**

While we are after encouraging a healthier and safer (non)use, and discouraging excessive use, we are not idealising non-user as 'authentic humans' and potential over-misusers as 'distracted addicts' [3]. What we sought to uncover is how the difference and similitude of values can be incorporated into the approaches that inform the research and design of social media platforms. Although we have witnessed the proliferation of approaches like the human-value sensitive design, culturally sensitive design, community centred design and so on, what is missing in the literature is how researchers' positionalities and participants socio-cultural values are negotiated in the process of developing context specific practices. One might argue that the dichotomies of 'out there' and 'in here', of using approaches to designing tools that are expected to be used globally but often designed from 'in here' might gradually bring about a destruction of the sociality values guiding the communities 'out there'.

The issue set out is one that hope to develop relational concepts for understanding, studying, designing, and evaluating interactive systems in such unstable scenario. The emphasis is on how people's ethics, values and traditional beliefs towards social life can be transplanted into design thinking and processes. This provide means for articulating the implications of how to design technologies for the improvement of actor's social life, ensure their

digital safety and act as a means of empowering their thoughts and experience. As much as HCI has brought us together as researchers, we hope that through our reasoning of the different perspective we will uncover, we can move towards developing cross-cultural design practices that can inform the design of relational and communal tools that can bring us closer together rather than divide us by mere difference in social values. Here, what is familiar, unfamiliar, and strange to us will be made available for analysis and ultimately design. We might have socio-ethnic and religious differences, we share a common inspiration of social coexistence, good health and prosperity, and thus can be united through design.

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