

Title

The social media and risky sexual behaviours among adolescent urban youths in Mkoba 6, Gweru, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

There is a dearth of academic literature that interrogate the role of social media on risky sexual behaviours among urban youths in Zimbabwe. The *ubuntu* or *hunhu* perspective was adopted to analyse the realities of these youths. Ostensibly, research findings suggest that there is a close relationship between social media and risky sexual behaviours among adolescent youth. Some of the risk sexual behaviours include early sexual debut, pre-marital sex, sexting and sexualised self-presentation among

others. Drawing from *ubuntu* perspective, the sexual behaviours demonstrate moral decadence prevalent among urban youths as a result of the use of some of the social media. However, there are questions that remain such as whose morals? Who is to blame for the moral decadence? An exploratory qualitative research design was used to generate data for this study. The paper concludes by arguing for the control of social media among youths so as to reduce risky sexual behaviours among them.

Key words

Social media, youths, risky sexual behaviours, Gweru, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Social media and risky sexual behaviours are matters of substantial concern as they affect adolescent youths the world over. Bernays et al (2018) observed that the behaviour of adolescents is recognised increasingly as having substantial and long term consequences for their health. Livingstone and Haddon (2009) and Vandoninck et al (2011) seem to agree that there are three types of risks that youths may be exposed to while using the internet. These are content risks, contact risks and conduct risks. Ostensibly there is a dearth of academic literature that interrogate the role of social media on risky sexual behaviours among urban youths in Zimbabwe. This paper problematises the role of social media on the risky sexual behaviours among urban youths in Zimbabwe using Mkoba 6 in Gweru as a case study. Griffiths (2013) observed that social media includes platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, My Space, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Facetime among others. Shaffer and Kipp (2014) define adolescence is a physical and psychological human developmental stage between childhood and adulthood. Steiberg (2005) observed that adolescence is a period of volatile emotional responsiveness, experimentation in risky behaviours, often involving conflicts with parents or guardians and increased vulnerability within the child. Bernays et al (2018) noted that adolescence is described as a behavioural rather than a life course category and an inherently dangerous one. Seemingly, the research findings suggest that there is a close relationship between social media and risky sexual behaviours. Some of the risky sexual behaviours include sexting, sexualised self-presentation, pornography, premarital sex and early sexual debuts among others.

Background

Conceptual framework

The study was informed by *Ubuntu* or *Unhu* philosophy. Samkange and Samkange (1980) are some of the earliest scholars writing about *Ubuntu* and they define it as a code of behaviour in which a human being treats others with courtesy, kindness, consideration and friendliness. *Ubuntu* is more than being a human being but is a profound concept and principle which guides behaviour. According to Samkange and Samkange (1980), *Ubuntu* is a value system principally associated with black and Bantu speaking peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa. *Ubuntu* may have some ideas that are similar to other cultures but the concept of *Hunhuism* itself is unique to Bantu speaking peoples, regardless of individual tribal differences (Samkange and Samkange, 1980). It has different names across various languages and dialects and some of these include *vutho* and *unhu*. The basic tenets of the African moral philosophy are brotherhood, collective unity, goodwill, collective identity, generosity and protection of community welfare and interests (Tutu, 1999). The underlying principle is that humanity is achieved through others hence the popular adage 'a person is a person through other persons' (Metz, 2007). Samkange and Samkange (1980) who also refer to *Ubuntu* as *Hunhuism* and emphasize on that any behaviour that is not acceptable is termed as '*kushaya unhu*', meaning that it reflects a lack of *Ubuntu* or *Unhu*. Conversely, any behaviour that is pro social and in line with norms is considered to be '*kuva ne hunhu*' meaning that it embodies the ideals of *Hunhuism* (Samkange and Samkange, 1980).

The philosophy emphasizes a number of principles which are in relevant to the contextualisation of the

African problem of social media amongst young people. The African Moral Philosophy will be used in the study to explore how social media impacts on adolescent compliance with the values of *Ubuntu* and familial and societal relationships between adolescents and their elders. The utility of this framework in this study is that it seeks to examine the interaction between *Ubuntu* and social media, which is a foreign technology made popular and accessible through globalisation, with particular interest in adolescents who use social media the most. The core tenets of *Ubuntu* will be discussed in relation to how adolescents experience social media.

According to Mphahlele (2005), in the context of *Ubuntu*, a person's identity is determined exclusively in the greater collective meaning that one's identity lies within the extended community. This principle can be used to depict how social media has corroded the idea of a collective identity which is valued within the collectivist African value system. Bridesell (2012) asserts that social media has an influence on sexuality outcome and identity formation, particularly dating sites. Dating sites provide adolescents with a framework of thinking about their sexuality as they contain descriptive fields in which one can enter their specific sexual preferences, interests and fetishes (Small, 2004). A good example is dating sites such as gay.com and lesbotronic.com which specifically target homosexual users and encourage them to realise their sexual rights and identities. Ross (2005) posits that sexual cultures are shaped through computer related communication and social media is no exception. The conflict of values comes in in that African communities are hetero-normative when it comes to sexuality as they view the essence of sexual intercourse as procreation (Mphahlele 2004). Adolescents identifying themselves as homosexual

deviates from the collective identity which aims to further community good through expanding the community by reproduction. Social media use in adolescents corrodes the African philosophy of community identity as it encourages adolescents to create their own individual sexual identities which defeat the common moral responsibility of expanding the community through procreation.

Another dimension emerging from social media use which goes against the African moral philosophy is that social media appears to undermine human dignity. An action is deemed right in *Ubuntu* if it upholds human dignity and does not lower the self-worth of the other (Metz, 2007). Social media can be viewed as corrosive to individual self-worth, which in turn affects the wider community since identities and experiences are inter-connected. Amongst the traditional Karanga, sex and genitalia are sacred and shall not be discussed or looked at in public (Makamure, 2015). Social media, however, promotes adolescent sexual permissiveness and sexual expressiveness, which negates the principle of human dignity. For instance, adolescent girls and boys can post their semi-nude and nude pictures on platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, SnapChat and Facebook or share them more privately in inboxes of applications such as Facebook Messenger, Whatsapp and WeChat. Museka and Taringa (2014) argue that social media has placed sex in the public arena and has corroded the values of the African Moral philosophy, giving the example of how teenagers exchange sexually explicit images, text messages and videos. One's human dignity is degraded when they display sacred parts to the online community and this inevitably means there is a familial and communal degradation since *Ubuntu* emphasizes on brotherhood and collective identity.

According to the African moral philosophy, an action is right if it promotes the well-being of others and is wrong when it undermines human well-being (Metz, 2007). Everyone is responsible for the welfare of the next person and should protect others from harm, not inflict it. Adolescent social media users are both perpetrators and victims of cyber bullying which is the harassment of an individual on the cyberspace (Museka and Taringa, 2014). Harassment can occur in the form of the use of derogatory language in the comment section, sharing of sexually explicit media and spreading of rumours which go viral online to the detriment of the victim's self-esteem and reputation. Social media has also led to young girls being victims of online sexual predators. Cyber bullying impacts negatively on adolescent victims and studies have linked cyber bullying to adolescent suicide, self-harm and suicidal tendencies (Hinduja and Patchin, 2019). Social media sometimes undermines human well-being, especially in cases in which predators target users online and convince them to meet in person

and inflict harm on the unsuspecting victims. A good example is that of two girls from Nigeria who were raped and killed by friends that they had made online (Abdullahi and Abdulqari, 2018; John et al, 2018). This goes against the principle of goodwill and the obligation to keep your neighbours safe instead of inflicting harm. An individual who inflicts harm on others is, therefore, lacking in *Ubuntu*. Taking an African moral perspective, social media is the antithesis of humanity and solidarity as it brings about the harm of other people.

The African moral philosophy is a relevant perspective to contextualise social media within an African setting as it helps to show the interaction between social media and ingrained cultural beliefs and obligations. Social media, when using *Ubuntu* as a theoretical framework, goes against the core tenets of the African Moral philosophy which are brotherhood, harmony and humanity. It can be used to show how social media has created discord within the Zimbabwean social setting and has further divided the younger and older generations as adolescents try to maintain their independence and elders attempt to keep them in line with social norms.

Research Methodology

The study was a qualitative study of phenomenological nature, which aimed to gain an understanding of humans at an experiential level. The essence of a phenomenological study is to uncover and interpret a respondent's cognitive processing of regarding some common experience (Rubin and Babbie, 2011).

The researcher chose the qualitative research design because qualitative research seeks the meaning ascribed to a phenomenon whilst quantitative studies measure a behaviour (Bell and Bryman, 2011). The researcher was interested in gaining an understanding of the subjective experiences of adolescent social media users in relation to risky sexual behaviours. The qualitative design was also favoured in this research over the quantitative design since it places the participant as the focal point in the study (Bell and Bryman, 2011:308). The interest in the participants' subjective experiences means that the participants, not the researcher, have expertise on the experience of the study at hands.

The study was conducted in Mkoba Township in Gweru. It is a high density suburb with a number of local secondary schools. Despite being a high population density and low income area, the township has access to both mobile data internet connectivity and private WiFi networks provided by telecommunication companies such as Econet Wireless, NetOne, Africom, Powertel, Telecel and TelOne. Access to the internet is through

technologies such as mobile cellular phones, laptop computers, desktop computers, smart televisions and tablets. Adolescents who do not have private WiFi connections at home access the internet at local internet cafés at local shopping centres and in the central business district. Curriculum changes have also increased internet penetration amongst adolescents since smartphones and laptops are now required as part of the E-learning system. As a result, children who do not have smartphones or who are not allowed to use cell phones still have access to the internet, with limited parental interference. The adolescents of Mkoba town ship were relevant to the study since the internet can be accessed in their area of abode.

Purposive sampling has been described by Guarte and Barrios (2006) as the random selection of sampling elements within the section of the target population with the most information on the characteristic of interest. Within the target population, the researcher extracted a sample by making contact with a local high school. With the permission of school authorities, the researcher issued out letters to students to give to their parents from the first to the fourth form. Five letters were issued out per form and two respondents were being picked from each form from the parents who would have given consent to their child to take part in the research. The names of parents and children who would have agreed to take part in the study were numbered with males taking even numbers and females odd numbers. The numbers were randomly picked from the list in order to extract a sample and to minimise bias. The school is the most opportune place from which a sample of both the key informants and adolescents can be derived since adolescents are most likely to spend most of their time at school.

Flick et al (2009) posit that qualitative research samples must be small since the essence of qualitative research is to capture the subjective experience of participants in relation to a particular phenomenon. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative studies, focuses more on the quality of the data than the quantity. The overall sample size is fifteen. Ten children were selected from adolescents from Mkoba 6 town ship in Gweru. The sample were gender sensitive, carrying an equal number of boys and girls. Three parents and two teachers were also interviewed to provide more insight since they are the caregivers. The number of parents is more than that of the teachers since parents are the primary caregivers responsible for the primary socialisation of the individual at home.

The study made use of qualitative data collection methods. The aim of a qualitative study is to gain an understanding of individual experience (Rubin and Babbie, 2011). The researcher made use of in-depth

interviews and key informant interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with the adolescents. The in-depth interview is an unstructured interview which has been defined as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Saunders et al, 2016). The in-depth interview requires the researcher to create rapport with the participants because of its informal nature and this helps to increase disclosure. This is important since the participants are adolescents who are sensitive beings so there is a need for the researcher to take care not to affront them in order to gain in depth knowledge. This technique was selected over the focus group discussion to reduce the risk that disclosure would be reduced out of fear that other adolescents would disclose personal information of others after the research.

Key informant interviews are interviews in which the researcher targets participants who are regarded to have expert knowledge about a phenomenon and tend to occupy a position of responsibility (Marshall, 1996). Key informant interviews were used to obtain information from parents and teachers, who are the gatekeepers of the adolescent groups. Parents and teachers have inside knowledge of the needs and problems of the adolescents since they are caregivers of the interest group in question. Both interviews will be semi-structured. The researcher was guided by a list of themes and a few key questions and these guided the questions that the participants will be asked (Saunders et al, 2016 p391). The rest of the questions were generated when probing the participants' responses.

Research Findings

Social media and adolescent sexuality

Sexualised self-presentation

The researcher found that social media leads to the imposition of adult sexuality on adolescent boys and girls. This is most because of the influence of celebrity accounts. There is a growing trend of 'insta-famous' people who are mostly young adults who identify as 'influencers'. Their claim to fame is having scores of followers on Instagram. Their accounts often show various media they post which is sexually explicit. These insta-celebrities are often the role models of adolescents (Papadopoulous, 2010). As result, self-presentation on social media is often sexualised because posts which are sexually suggestive attracts more likes, followers, comments and shares. The following extracts from in-depth interviews show the relationship between sexualised self-presentation and popularity.

I have posted pics in short shorts. If my mother found out, she would kill me. They gain me more likes though. I get up to three hundred likes.

I'm into athletics sister. I'm very popular with the girls so I post pictures on Facebook with my broad shoulders showing. The girls go crazy over it.

My mother monitors my Facebook account so I am careful when posting but other girls my age post these revealing pictures. A girl from my class posts a lot with her cleavage showing.

'If you want to be popular your Instagram feed should have fly photos. Boys like photos of girls in miniskirts. That is why I post in them.

I feel very sad that I'm very skinny. Other boys in my class post pics on the Gram (Instagram) with their muscles showing. They are very popular.

Key informants confirmed the responses of participants that social media contributes to self-sexualisation amongst adolescents. They were very adamant that social media, in this case contributed to the loss of *hunhu*. This is what one parent had to say:

I started supervising my child's Facebook after a church mate's child posted sexually explicit pictures on Facebook. The mother was very hurt.

Sexting

Sexting was found to be common between both male and female adolescents in the study. The motivations for sexting seemed to be the same and these included finding a partner to date, peer pressure and passing time. All adolescent participants had at least received a message on social media that was sexually explicit in the form of either a nude picture, an explicit video, an explicit voice note or an explicit written text message. Sexting seemed to be a very common fixture of adolescent social media communication but it was often reported to be accompanied by a number of negative outcomes. Participants reported that some peers who were involved in sexting sometimes had their text messages, images and videos go viral because someone shared them with other people. Such occurrences were often embarrassing and traumatising as they resulted in bullying online and at school. Ringrose et al (2013) also found that situations in which sexts are published, victims are prone to psychological stress, depression and disillusionment stemming from the mockery they have to endure. All of the in this study, some participants reported not to have participated in sexting but awareness of the repercussions of sexting were unanimous. Participants had this to say about sexting:

Sister, that hunny once sent my G a shot of her kitty (vagina) and Douglas (boy) distributed them to everyone on Shareit. She transferred.

It is normal amongst us but the scary part is the risk of the sexually explicit pictures ending up with other people.

We all do this but the second your DMs become viral you become a freak. The crew will laugh at you. You almost drop out of school because of embarrassment.

All key informants had at least once seen inappropriate sexual messages and pictures of other children but had never witnessed their own children in act. The common complaint was that they cannot access their children's social media accounts which makes monitoring very difficult. Key informants repeatedly complained that social media has resulted in the loss of *Unhu*, with particular regard to the sexual taboos such as revealing genitals to strangers. Key informants had this to say about sexting:

'We see these pictures on WhatsApp where even us can see them. You then wonder whose child it is and who raised them?'

I ever find out that my daughter sends inappropriate messages, I will beat them up thoroughly. Now the problem is that I cannot operate social networking sites such as WhatsApp so I will never know.

They no longer have any Ubuntu, displaying their private parts to someone who will not marry them. These issues of nowadays, I do not know how this will end.

Online activities are a risk factor that compromises offline safety

Another theme that emerged from the study is that online activities put adolescents at risk offline. Adolescents were aware of the fact that self-sexualisation placed them at risk, despite increasing their online following. Online privacy is another issue which emerged as placing adolescents at risk. Putting demographic information such as electronic mail, mobile number and home address seemed to lead to a higher susceptibility for adolescents to be stalked by other SNS users. Adolescents may agree to meet their online friends and this may result in problems such as rape, sexual harassment, physical and emotional abuse. Adolescent girls in the in depth interviews expressed a fear for their safety on and offline.

A girl from Nashville High was almost kidnapped by a man she met on the Gram (Instagram). They say he used to like all of her pics. She is a real insta baddie (popular girl on Instagram). That's why I prefer to befriend people who are followed by people that I know'

My mother always warns me about the kind of things I post. She says some men target young teenage girls online.

Our Guidance and counselling teacher last year said we should not post inappropriate pictures because a lot of girls in America have disappeared because they were tricked_by older men on Facebook.

Male adolescent participants seemed to have an awareness of the risks that adolescents are exposed to on the internet but were more concerned about the girls' safety rather than their own.

'I'm almost 18 now. Do you think someone can just say to me 'let us meet' and then I just disappear just like that? That is the tendency of girls, they believe everything they hear.

Under what circumstances would I be kidnapped? Girls are the ones that get kidnapped because they are too trusting.

Key informants confirmed what adolescents said about cyber space being an unsafe place for adolescents. One teacher explained in the excerpt below how school rules have changed to try to reduce risks for children:

We no longer allow our students to get picked up by random cars after school. All motorist has to report at the admin and explain their relation to the student. This decision was prompted by that story of that girl from Nashville high school who is said to have been attacked by someone they met on Facebook.

The link between the imposition of adult sexual features on adolescents online and their indulgence in age-disproportionate sexual relationships

The study also found that imposition of adult sexual features on adolescents was directly linked to adolescents indulging in age disproportionate sexual relationships. During in-depth interviews, one of the most common narratives amongst female adolescent participants was that older men, known amongst young people as 'blessers', approached them for sexual favours in exchange of financial favours. The sexualisation of teenagers carries risks for them, particularly amongst the girls. Older men luring young girls online can expose them to risks such as sexually transmitted diseases, early sexual debuts and unplanned pregnancies.

'Havachatodi. Vanoda ana Uncle Bae. There is this nigga who done send girls DMs promising a link up in exchange for bag. These girls want to secure the bag. They (female peers) are no longer interested in

us. They want to be with older men. There is a man who sends girls Direct Messages promising money in exchange of meeting up in person. Girls want money.

'Girls who are doing their Advanced level studies have blessers {older men whom they have sexual relationships in exchange for money}. Blessers are clever, look for these girls on Instagram. These girls think they are famous because they are popular with older men. They will regret it one day.

A girl from my class had an abortion after getting pregnant by a blesser she met on Facebook. It is rumoured that she once contracted a sexually transmitted disease).

A boy in form six has a Chimhamha (sugar mommy). They met on Facebook. We done think he is the real G' (we think he is the coolest person)

Key informants also found the rate at which adolescents entered age disproportionate relationships worrying. Teachers expressed their worries over the seemingly increasing number of girls who have sexual relationships with 'blessers'. Excerpts from interviews with them show that adolescents' sexual health and safety is compromised by their online communication.

You see, daughter ka, we no longer allow our students to be picked up by cars at the gate unless the person comes and confirms their relation to the student at the school admin. Sugar mommies and sugar daddies have been picking up our children and taking them to God knows where.

Two of my most brilliant literature students were impregnated by blessers they allegedly met online. Tell me what happens if you just know someone from the internet and they just take you to lodges? How will you track them? A real tragedy. It is as if Guidance and counselling no longer works.

Social media and social media pornography

This study found that sexual curiosity and experimentation during adolescence are heightened by the kind of content that adolescents access on social media sites. As discussed in above paragraphs, social media has given adolescents easy access pertaining to sex and sexuality and has contributed to the sexualisation of children in the form of sexual awareness and assigning adult sexual features on them. From the study, it appears as though some adolescents' awareness of their sexuality is highly influenced by social media. Social media pornography is an issue that needs addressing because of the rate at which adolescents can easily access it. Pornography is so ubiquitous that adolescents can be exposed to it but not out of

their volition. This can be in the form of nude pictures, semi-nude sexually suggestive pictures, sexually explicit videos popularly known as 'sex tapes', sexually explicit music and online games. Most of the boys said that they had at least clicked on a link which appeared as an advertisement on either Facebook or Instagram to play a game which turned out to be sexually explicit. Adolescent participants reported to have at least once received sexually explicit images, audios and videos in their inboxes and in group chats on WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram:

I clicked a link to play a game called mortal combat and it redirected me to a pornographic site. I was shocked but I watched anyway)

Ads high-key mislead us. You end up watching sexual things. So uncomfortable and embarrassing.

Key informants were also concerned about adolescents' consumption of pornographic material. They also expressed frustration of not being able to use the internet as efficiently as adolescents so they were not always able to monitor the activities of their adolescents. This is what one parent had to say about access to pornography:

My adolescent does not engage in such behaviours. However, I hear that some of the adolescents that are caught, seeing pornographic materials on their mobile phones. Do you think it is proper? The problem is that as adults some of us cannot properly operate some of these modern phones.

Similarly, teachers were concerned about adolescents' consumption of pornography. One teacher expressed wishes for the school internet system to block explicit content. This is what he had to say:

Every week we always have someone taken to the senior master because of getting caught watching pornography. I wish the school could arrange with Zol (service provider) to block sites with sexually explicit material. This is not morally right.

Premarital sex and early sexual debuts amongst adolescents

Premarital sex and early sexual debuts amongst adolescents were also raised during fieldwork in the study. Instead, they preferred to give examples of the experiences of peers such as cousins, neighbours, friends and classmates. Peer pressure on social media appears to be common where adolescent sexuality is concerned because the subject of sex is popular amongst the adolescent online community. A part of asserting one's identity by adolescence is doing the things that are regarded to be 'in' and 'cool'. This appeared to be the

motivating factor to some adolescents to indulge in sexual activities so as to fit in in conversations with their peers. Some of the adolescents had the following to say with regards to social media peer pressure and sexual experimentation:

Honestly, sex gives someone popularity. When I post that I am with and I am having sex with a particular girl, I get popular. Other girls start liking me and other boys give me praise)

Personally, I do not indulge in sexual activities but my popular peers are part of Facebook groups in which they talk about sex and they probably apply what they discuss in real life)

There is a girl in fourth form whom everyone talks about because she is always posting sexual content on Facebook. People talk about her with their friends.

Without exception, all key informants agreed that social media use contributed to largely negative peer influence with regards to sexual curiosity, experimentation and behaviour. The most recurrent concern expressed was that social media made information regarding sexuality easily accessible and this placed a lot of pressure on the young and impressionable users to indulge in premature sexual activities. Some of the accounts of the key informants depict a scenario in which adolescents seem to be exposed to negative sexual peer influence on social media:

As I said before), they think they know everything. They will see they do not one day and it will be too late. I have heard stories of paedophiles who target small boys and girls on this internet. But whom am I telling? No one'

This is the chatting that you like to talk about, spending your time discussing indecent sexually inappropriate topics. A certain girl was impregnated by a boy whom she met on social media. This issue of rushing to do things, they met in real life, had sexual intercourse but now she cannot track him down. Who suffers now? You)

Discussion

The social media is the antithesis of the *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* expects one to have a sense of dignity and to maintain the dignity of those around him (Metz 2007). When one posts sexually suggestive content online, they do not only degrade themselves but other users who consume the content. In addition, since one 'is a person through other people', this brings both the family and community to disrepute. Sexualised self-presentation is frowned upon in *Ubuntu* since the exposure of genitals to other people is taboo (Makamure, 2015). *Ubuntu*

emphasizes on collectivism and collectivism is closely associated with high levels of conformity (Kim, 1997). Adolescent behaviour on social media deviates from collective norms of conformity, human dignity and collective identity and this shows how social media is a problematic technology from the perspective of *Ubuntu*. Social media opposes *Ubuntu* and pose a threat to family harmony as parents and their adolescents conflict over what is and what is morally acceptable.

Most adolescents in the study revealed that they would like to have more followers. This validates the fact that during adolescence, adolescents are concerned with their social identity and want to be assessed positively, especially by their peers (Shaffer and Kipp, 2013). These findings confirm those of Daniel (2016) in which findings showed that adolescent social media users in the United States of America experienced a social pressure to portray themselves sexually on social network sites. Social media, therefore, challenges existing social norms with regards to decency of adolescents.

Sexting, in the context of *Ubuntu*, is problematic as it not only compromise personal dignity but also compromises communal dignity and places the family in disrepute. Identity is intertwined such that the behaviour of one person reflects on the community since child rearing is a communal exercise. In addition, sexting dissents from *Ubuntu* since the purity of the body is compromised, considering that the public display of genitalia is taboo in the context of *Ubuntu*.

The findings of this study concur with those of Baumgartner et al (2014) which found that between nine and approximately eleven and a half per cent of European adolescents participated in sexting, with higher percentages amongst boys in more traditional countries. In the United States of America, Houck et al (2014) found that twenty-two per cent of the adolescents in their study actively participated in sexting and that sexting was associated with various sexual behaviours. Social media is, therefore, a problem as it challenges existing social norms and widens the moral divide between older and younger generations.

The risks discussed in this segment show how social media is in strife with *Ubuntu*. The first point of contention is degrading one's human dignity and that of others by making one's genitalia easily accessible to others. The negative behaviour of one person is to the detriment of the whole community since *Ubuntu* operates on the principle of 'I am because you are', meaning that the behaviour of an individual reflects on the behaviour of everyone else. In addition, *Ubuntu* and maladaptive social media use are at odds because of the harm that individuals can come to offline at the hand of friends

made online. Kindness is one of the core tenets of *Ubuntu* and everyone is expected to look out for the wellbeing of the next person in a way popularly known as 'I am my brother's keeper' (Metz, 2007). Cyber bullying, stalking, threats, sexual harassment, kidnaping and killing all negate the principle of *Ubuntu* since they compromise the welfare of others.

The responses with regards to both online and offline security corroborate with a study by UNICEF (2011) which found that children tend to think that they are immune to online victimisation and that other children, especially those who are younger than them are at more risk than them. The study shows that there is a tendency of the feminisation of online sexual victimisation and real life sexual abuse as a result of friendships forged on social media. This is can be explained by the general view that females are the 'weaker' and more vulnerable sex. Offline safety has also been shown to be compromised by online activities as shown on study by Wolak et al (2008) where adolescents were kidnapped, raped and killed by online friends after meeting up with them in real life. Social media poses risks for adolescent users, even in their offline lives and this makes it contrast clearly with *Ubuntu* since it compromises adolescent wellbeing.

With regards to the theoretical framework of this study, social media is problematic as it compromises safety and reputation yet *Ubuntu* emphasizes on kindness and collective identity (Metz, 2007). In addition, parenting is a communal exercise so the idea of older people approaching adolescents for sexual favours in exchange of money negates the essence of *Ubuntu* since the aim becomes sexually exploiting children instead of contributing to their positive upbringing (Letseka, 2000: 186). Adolescent sexual harassment both online and offline because of social media use goes against the principles of kindness, generosity, peace and harmony, which are emphasized by *Ubuntu*. Social media has resulted in adolescents getting into age disproportionate sexual relationships which expose them to risks such as teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

These findings verify a study in Nigeria by Olagun (2013) in which social media plays a role in adolescent risky sexual decision making such as getting into the adult industry and professional sex work. In the United Kingdom, sexualisation of adolescents was linked to child sexual abuse and sexual harassment in primary and secondary schools (Papadopoulos, 2010). The risk of the sexually suggestive media content adolescents post becoming viral is also another issue that creates a host of other problems such as cyber bullying, loss of self-esteem, conflict with parents and becoming an easy target for sexual predators. The findings of

the study with regards to adolescent sexualisation show how social media is negating the values of *Ubuntu* and may justify views that social media is corrosive to the socio-cultural and moral fabric of communities.

Ubuntu does not condone the discussion and display of genitalia as this corrodes one's self-worth and that of others (Makamure, 2015). The dignity of one person is interlinked with that of the rest of the community as expressed by the adage 'I am because you are'. Social media, therefore, is a technology that places communal dignity under compromise. Those who felt uncomfortable with such content reported to the administrators of the social media sites and blocked or muted the senders as a way of cutting communication with such users. Studies by Hess (2015) and Mitchell et al (2012) also show that sometimes adolescents unwillingly access sexual content through pop-up advertisements and the former study also found that hashtags on Instagram also expose adolescents to sexually explicit material.

Taking from the perspective of *Ubuntu*, social media negates African morality. Adolescents are not expected to have premarital sex, early sexual debuts and to expose their genitals in public (Makamure, 2015). Premarital sex and early sexual debuts is a form of deviant behaviour as it reflects '*kushaya hunhu*'. Collectivist societies are characterised by high conformity (Letseka, 2000) and any deviant behaviour that does not conform to social norms is regarded to be a reflection of '*kushaya unhu*' (Samkange and Samkange, 1980). The findings corroborate studies by Kaufman et al (2014); Kimemia and Mugambi (2016) and Njoroge (2011) that linked adolescent social media use to risky sexual behaviours such as casual premarital sex, early sexual debuts and multiple sexual partners. What seemed to be a common narrative amongst key informants was that adolescents seemed to not take the advice of their elders and preferred to make their own choices even in the face of apparent risk. Adolescent independent streaks and their care givers words of caution were a source of conflict since the two groups are of different ages and share different perceptions of life.

Recommendations

The study proffers a number of recommendations with a view to reduce the risks associated with the use of social media among adolescent urban youths. Some of them include the following;

- The African Moral Philosophy is an important part of child rearing in Zimbabwe and has been under threat because of the influence of Western, individualist thinking and habits. The

important role of the extended family and communities in the raising of children should not be undermined. Interventions aimed at curbing the problems of social media amongst adolescents should be communitywide since the community is an important part of individual social and moral identity. The values that underpin *Ubuntu* are relevant in the resolution of the problems created by social media since there is an emphasis on the importance of human dignity, social harmony, peace, brotherhood and collective identity, all of which social media has been shown in this study to be an antithesis of. The African Moral Philosophy is a contextually relevant value system which should be strengthened in the educational curricula so as to equip adolescents with skills to navigate through life problems, some of which are social media connected. Community participation as a response to the problem of social media is important since the community plays an important role in the socialisation of adolescents,

- There is need for capacity building of key stakeholders on how to handle cases when a child's welfare has been compromised by digital communication, to provide counselling and support services to adolescents facing problems brought about by social media. Members of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services, particularly those working with children in conflict with the law at institutions such as the Whawha Young Offenders Prison, should have skills to assist adolescents who have been incarcerated. In addition, professionals in child welfare will also be able to educate and train parents and guardians on how to address social media use and risks within the household,
- There is need for a stakeholder engagement and collaboration within various service providers in order to create a system which safeguards child internet safety and educates communities. Within the case management system, social workers, teachers, the police force, Prisons and Correctional Services, the health ministry should have a support network system with effective a swift referral. Internet service providers should be involved within the stakeholder system because they have crucial information with regards to trends in social media use and safety issues.

Conclusion

The paper concludes by arguing that there is a close or intricate or complex relationship between the use of social media and risky sexual behaviours among adolescent urban youths. Some of the risky sexual behaviours associate with the use of social media are sexting, sexualised self-presentation, early sexual debut, premarital sex and social media pornography

among others. The risky sexual behaviours associated with the use of social media are against the key characteristics of *ubuntu* or *hunhu* perspective. For example, they demonstrate moral decadence. However, whose morals? Who to blame for the moral decadence. The moral decadence is also seen as abomination.

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