



PASTORAL CARE RESPONSE TO SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION IN CHRISTIAN HOMES

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Abstract

This paper examines the pastoral care response to social media addiction in Christian homes. It acknowledges that information technology and social media have significantly improved communication, interaction, information sharing, and relationships across geographical boundaries. However, excessive and uncontrolled use of social media can develop into addictive behaviour and negatively affect family life. The paper explores the nature and forms of social media, its biblical perspective, and its effects on Christian family relationships. The identified effects include neglect of family responsibilities, communication breakdown, invasion of privacy, marital unfaithfulness, unrealistic comparisons and expectations, weakened parent-child bonding, and negative effects on mental and emotional well-being. The paper further emphasises that social media addiction can weaken the quality of interpersonal relationships and reduce meaningful face-to-face interaction within the Christian home. In response, pastoral care is presented as an important intervention for individuals and families affected by social media addiction. Recommended strategies include establishing healthy boundaries, leading by example, promoting digital well-being, and applying the healing, sustaining, and educating functions of pastoral care. The paper concludes that social media should be used responsibly and purposefully. At the same time, families and churches should work together to promote healthy digital habits, strengthen family relationships, and preserve Christian values in the contemporary digital environment.

Keywords: Social Media, Addiction, Christian Home, Family Relationships, Pastoral Care, Digital Well-being.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has significantly transformed the way people live, communicate, work, and maintain relationships. Among the most influential developments is social media, which has become an important means of communication and interaction in contemporary society. Through many media platforms and social networking sites, individuals can communicate, share information, build relationships, and remain connected

regardless of geographical distance. Social media has therefore contributed positively to human interaction and has become an important part of everyday life.

Despite these benefits, the excessive and uncontrolled use of social media has raised significant concerns, particularly within families. What begins as a useful means of communication can develop into habitual or addictive use, causing individuals to devote excessive time and attention to online activities at the expense of their responsibilities and relationships. In Christian homes, social media addiction can affect communication, family bonding, parental responsibilities, marital relationships, privacy, and the general emotional well-being of family members. The paper observes that family members who become excessively absorbed in social media may spend less time engaging in meaningful face-to-face interaction, thereby weakening the interpersonal relationships that are essential to a healthy Christian family.

Communication is fundamental to human relationships and also has an important place in the biblical understanding of God's relationship with humanity. The paper presents communication as having a divine origin, noting that God communicated during creation and continued to communicate with His people through various means, including leaders and prophets. This biblical perspective emphasises that communication should contribute positively to relationships and human well-being. Consequently, the misuse of contemporary communication technologies raises important ethical, relational, and pastoral concerns for Christian families.

The effects of social media addiction on Christian homes are discussed in this paper. The challenges demonstrate that social media addiction is not merely an issue of technology but also a pastoral and family concern requiring appropriate intervention. In view of the challenges, pastoral care plays an important role in helping individuals and families develop healthier relationships with social media. Therefore, this paper examines the pastoral care response to social media addiction in Christian homes, with particular attention to its effects on family relationships and practical strategies through which the church and Christian families can respond to the challenge.

Overview of Social Media

Social media refers to new forms of media that involve interactive participation. Ajeigbe (2016, 26) opines that interaction among people of common interest and relations has been a serious concern from generation to generation. Man relies on communication because man is a social being who is always ready to strengthen relationships, which has helped develop social media. Media development is divided into two eras: the broadcasting era and the interactive era. In the age of broadcasting, media were almost exclusively centralised. It was when a radio or television station, a newspaper company, or a movie production studio disseminated messages to a large audience. At that period, feedback to media outlets was often indirect, delayed and impersonal. Feedback is typically on a smaller scale, conveyed via personal letters, telephone calls, or, occasionally, photocopied family newsletters.

Akande (2006: 112) asserts that Information Technology concerns the ability to handle and process information using electronic devices. He further explains that machines primarily process data, enabling users to handle, organise, retrieve, store, and analyse information efficiently. Chukeku and Ajeigbe (Lecture note) view information technology as the use of information to meet human needs or purposes, with reference to contemporary devices such as the internet,

videophones, mobile computing, Skype, and Facebook. Social media provides a way for people to share ideas, content, and thoughts, and to build relationships, in a very short time. Anyone can create, comment on, and add social media content, including text, audio, video, images, and community content.

All social media involve some digital platform, which may be either mobile or stationary. The two familiar characters that can help define social media are: Social media allows for various forms of participation, which means that it is never passive. The second characteristic is its involvement in interaction. This interaction can be with established friends, family, acquaintances, or new people who share common interests or a shared circle of acquaintances. The internet services commonly associated with social media include the following:

Email: This is probably the most commonly used form of communication in everyday life. Email involves users logging into an account to send and receive messages to other users. Anyone who sends or receives an email must have an account. The use of email predated the internet, but with the advent of the internet, it became more prominent. Email is a quick and highly reliable way to send documents, images, or essential details at a moment's notice or share one piece of information with many people (Dewing, 2012: 40).

Texters: Next to email is texting, a two-way communication channel that allows individuals to send messages to another person or group quickly. It is not only young adults who text; people of all ages have adapted to texting. As texting technology improves, it becomes easier to text photos or copy and paste links to share pictures, which the receiver can later redistribute to others (Dewing, 40).

Blogs: A blog is a web page where an individual or group can share information or ideas with a large audience online. The blog covers a range of topics, including politics. People can interact with both the blog author and other commenters. For example, many newspaper stories conclude with an opportunity for readers to share their thoughts or comments on current issues (Dewing, 40).

Message Boards: The message board is popular with people seeking social support or advice. It may be a wounded warrior who aims to make sense of life after war or someone facing breast cancer who wants to talk to someone else who has been through the experience. Advice rendered through this site enables users to rate businesses, such as restaurants (Hyoryung, 2014: 23).

Connection Sites: These are online dating sites where users approach dating by creating a profile that reveals who they are and what they are looking for in a relationship. The danger is that people may be sceptical about how honest the information displayed online is. The benefit is that it enables people to find friends, potential marriage partners, and groups for activities. Users in this group can send messages to the meet-up group leader to learn more about the activity or determine if they would be a good fit for the group (Hyoryung, 21).

Social Networking Sites: These include Facebook and social networking sites, which are ubiquitous and widely accessible in contemporary culture. One feature that makes it special is the list of users one can connect with, typically based on friendship, family, work relationships, or even weak ties. It is an excellent way to meet new people, although other social networking sites now discourage people from adding connections they do not know.

Games and Entertainment: These often have a social dimension, allowing friends to challenge each other for higher scores, send gifts, and access advanced gameplay features. Examples of these games include puzzle games and Farmville, where players can build a virtual farm, town, or business, and interact with fellow players by patronising or lending a helping hand. These games allow for some chat or interaction to accompany each move (Adeyinka, 2015: 316).

Wikis: A wiki is a collection of web pages where any participant can modify any page or create a new one using their browser. One well-known example is Wikipedia, a free online encyclopedia that uses Wiki technology (Hyoryung & Kannan). It might be more accurate to say that you tweet to answer the question, "what one is thinking about" (Kwark, 2010: 151).

Badoo: Badoo helps you stay in touch wherever you go, whatever you want. It is a platform to play Badoo. Popular encounter game and get matched with other users. It is a way to break the ice and chat to new people. Although Badoo will not reveal the exact location of its subscribers, it will enable them to find people nearby who share common interests. It increases one's chances of being seen by people who share one's interests and strike up a conversation (Badoo, 2020: 22).

WhatsApp: WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application for smartphones. It enables users to send and receive location information, images, videos, audio, and text messages in real-time to individuals and groups of friends at no cost. This social network handles several messages per day and is a messaging application that anyone can download to their smartphone to send messages to and from other people's mobile phones (Church & Oliveira, 2020: 945). WhatsApp is available for most modern smartphones, including iPhones and BlackBerrys. Unlike traditional text messages sent via SMS, WhatsApp utilises a phone's data connection, so one does not need to pay for individual messages sent (Hedland, 2020).

Biblical Perspective of Social Media

Communication plays a vital role in the Bible. It is the pivot upon which the whole creation rotates. In Genesis 1:26, God summons the host of heaven to come for the creation of man. This idea was to share His mind on the project of man's creation, which He had made for the host of heaven by communicating to them through a calling. Verse 26 of Genesis Chapter 1 says: "Then God said Come, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the bird of the air, over the livestock of the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the earth." This calling was made to assign a portion of work to each of these hosts for easy coordination of the earth and all creatures dwelling in it. Ishola-Esan (2010) views communication as having a divine origin, tracing it back to God, the initiator of communication. God communicates to man through various channels, and man communicates back to God.

Considering this, one can define communication as the process of sharing thoughts, ideas, or values in a way that affects the recipient's life. God used verbal and non-verbal techniques in His method of communication. He spoke to the people in the Bible both audibly and through his actions. In fact, Genesis, being the Bible's first book, is filled with spoken words of God to man, to the land, and to the waters, with an expected direct positive proportion of action. Ogundipe (2015: 17) asserts that the statement made by the Lord of life was clearly assimilated and understood by the water and the land. The two of them were attentive and took note of every intricacy of the instruction. They also decipher what the creator wants and how He wants things done.

God's spoken words, which were intimately involved in creation, have made everything beautiful to this day. God communicated to the people of Israel through their leaders, such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and other prophets in the Old Testament, to align them with His laws. This highlights the importance of proper communication, as God Himself has made and continues to make good use of it. However, it is unfortunate that people are misusing it, bringing disaster upon society.

Effects of Addiction to Social Media on Family Relationships

Social media has both positive and negative impacts on an individual's and their family's lives. But addiction to social media poses a threat to the relationships of members of the family. Regarding internet usage among family members, everyone has the liberty to maintain multiple social media accounts that divert their attention and time. People who use social media can post or receive anything they want on their accounts. Starting from pictures and other things, they want from their followers. This means that the kind of relationship family members maintain is sometimes influenced by their exposure to social media. Previously, family members were bound together by a strong cord of relationship through shared experiences and heart-to-heart, face-to-face discussions. But in the present time, addiction to social media has made family members barely talk to one another. This leads to the impacts of addiction to social media on family relationships.

1. **Neglected Responsibilities and Time Management:** Social media addiction can lead to neglect of responsibilities within the family unit. Individuals may spend excessive amounts of time on social media, neglecting household chores, parenting duties, or important family commitments. There is a case of a housewife who burnt the food she was cooking because she was overwhelmed with Instagram. She was glued to her phone, doing something on Instagram, until she started smelling that the whole kitchen was almost engulfed in flames. This neglect can strain relationships, create resentment, destroy properties and hinder the functioning of the family as a cohesive unit.
2. **Communication Breakdown:** Social media addiction often leads to a breakdown in effective communication within families. As individuals become engrossed in their virtual worlds, they may prioritise online interactions over face-to-face conversations with their family members. This preoccupation with social media can result in a lack of attentiveness and emotional availability, leaving family members feeling unheard and neglected (Roberts & David, 2016). Some members of the family who are addicted to social media have unknowingly broken the bond of togetherness in the home. They find it easier to spend a long time on social media than with their family members. It is so serious that it has been proven that the same kind of withdrawal symptoms as a drug addict have been found in a social media addict if they are unable to check their social media. Family members will discover that they prefer to communicate online or on social media rather than talking to one another in person. Couples may spend time next to each other, but their minds have been engrossed in their social entertainment as they scroll through their feeds.
3. **Invasion of Privacy:** Social media addiction can erode privacy within families. With the constant urge to share personal information, photographs, and updates online, boundaries between private and public life can become blurred. This invasion of privacy can lead to conflicts, mistrust, and a breakdown in communication, as family members may feel exposed or violated by the public display of family matters (Gao et al., 2018). This has also exposed some families to external attacks.

4. **Unfaithfulness Between Marriage Partners:** Addiction to social media has given room to unfaithfulness in marriage. Couples may be nurturing other relationships apart from their partner, which may eventually lead to extramarital affairs. Some couples have entered into marital infidelity by sharing their love with the opposite sex as a result of their constant presence on social media. Olufemi (2014: 25) asserts that some of the challenges of couples living apart include emotional separation and consequent exposure to sexual temptations, which sometimes lead to illicit affairs. Spouses who live apart are prone to discussing sensitive issues with a colleague or a stranger in terms of disappointment, dejection or depression on social media. The soul tie that may develop from such frequent discussion might lead to different kinds of sexual immorality in contemporary times.

This has also broken the gene of enjoying sexual intercourse between couples. Some couples now enjoy watching pun videos to arouse their sexual urge rather than having sex honestly with their partner. Some will even force their partners to do a particular style they have watched on social media. And this has caused a lot of problems among Christian couples. This may result in marital conflict that can ultimately lead to the dissolution of the marriage.

5. **Comparison and Unrealistic Expectations:** Social media addiction often fosters a culture of comparison, where individuals constantly compare their lives to the curated and often embellished lives of others. This can create unrealistic expectations within families, as members may feel pressured to live up to the idealised standards portrayed on social media. The constant exposure to seemingly perfect lives can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction, jealousy, and strained relationships among family members.

6. **Detrimental Effects on Parent-Child Bonding:** Social media addiction can significantly impact the parent-child relationship. Parents who are addicted to social media may exhibit reduced emotional availability and spend less quality time engaging with their children (Mesch & Talmud, 2016). This lack of parental presence and engagement can affect the development of a strong bond and may lead to feelings of neglect or detachment in children. Social media has fostered a youthful cultural perspective in the current digital age, completely transforming the landscape of interpersonal connections, communication, & self-expression, which are largely disconnected from their parents' culture. Young people currently have unrivalled access to many social media platforms, made possible by the proliferation of cell phones & web access, which enables brief, intuitive communication with peers and exposure to diverse content, rather than spending quality time with their parents. Due to the break in bonding, teenagers in particular are inclined to make decisions that could cost them their lives. (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Moreover, teens' vulnerability to addictive behaviours is exacerbated by social media's omnipresent nature and its addictive characteristics, likes, notices, and virtual motivating forces (Elhai et al., 2017). The concern that social media is oppressing young individuals raises genuine questions about its potential impact on family relationships. The family is the primary socialisation context in childhood and adolescence, contributing to teenagers' socioemotional development, identity formation, and change (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). In any case, the unavoidable impacts of social media use can disrupt the normal functioning of families, leading to conflicts, breakdowns in communication, and a decline in family unity.

7. Impact on Mental Health and Well-being: Excessive social media use has been associated with adverse mental health outcomes such as increased levels of anxiety, depression, and feelings of loneliness (Lin et al., 2016; Marino et al., 2018). These mental health challenges can have a significant impact on family relationships, affecting overall family dynamics, emotional support, and the ability to cope with everyday stressors.

Pastoral Care Strategies for Individuals with Social Media Addiction

1. Setting healthy boundaries: The fundamental quality of being human is to set healthy boundaries for whatever family members are doing. Pastoral care is distinguished by the caregiver, the context in which the care is given, the ethic by which the care is governed, and the goal toward which the care is directed. Nkechi (2012) observes that one issue about relating and interacting with everybody is love. When couples realise the love between them, discussing issues will not be too difficult for them. Establishing clear boundaries regarding social media usage within the family will encourage designated screen-free times or zones, such as meal times or family outings, to promote face-to-face interactions and quality time together. This highlights the importance of love as a panacea for relationships and the key to initiating heartfelt discussions.

2. Leading by Example: Parents and older family members should model responsible social media use. By demonstrating healthy technology habits, such as limiting screen time and prioritising real-life interactions, they can set a positive example for younger family members and promote a balanced approach to technology use. To achieve this, you must be determined and disciplined. Gaining control over social media addiction is as toxic as fighting sex addiction, drug addiction, and every other evil addiction. This is because the more you fight trying to free yourself from its grasp, the more it fights back, holding you down. Parents can also lead by example by drafting a daily to-do list. Ensure that less attention and time are allocated to your phone or any other devices you use to access numerous social media platforms. Put your phone away until you've finished the day's business. Until you have sought the face of God and have done everything that needs to be done. After this, you can then pick up your phone.

3. Promoting Digital Well-being: A Healthy relationship with technology must be encouraged by promoting digital well-being practices. This includes setting limits on social media use, practising digital detoxification, and engaging in offline activities such as hobbies, outdoor outings, or family game nights. Chinebell (1966:77) submits that nurturing aims to enable people to develop their God-given potentials is good. To him, digital skills should be built within the family; there are online and digital opportunities for as many as can take advantage of them. This may require raising families to maximise the use of the internet and other social media tools for spiritual, financial, and academic improvement. He affirms further that there is a need to train every family member in the right thing. This calls for online and offline opportunities that can empower them.

4. Healing Function: This function is to overcome some impairment by restoring the person to wholeness and healing them to advance beyond their previous condition. Oyedele (2011:48) submits that it consists of binding up wounds, repairing emotional damages, or restoring the lost condition. Social media addicts could be revived under this phase. The gap created in the heart of the social media addict in the family needs to be filled; a pastoral caregiver can only supply this under the healing function of their competent and professional caregiving guide.

5. Sustaining Function: This has to do with rendering help to people when they feel overwhelmed, or when it seems their identity or personality is being shrunk. Theodore (2020) affirms that "sustaining" is a modern cognate of the word "comfort," which, in biblical usage, means to speak to a person in a friendly way or to draw close to someone. A social media addict can be sustained by not staying too far from them when their addiction is brought under control. Then, they need a sustaining ministry in four ways: preservation, consolation, consolidation, and redemption.

6. Educating Function: This involves enlightening the family members on issues that can help them maximise opportunities. Ayankeye (2013:85) opines that Christians should be prepared in their families and local churches through education by pastoral caregivers and counsellors on coping with various life experiences. Family and church members can be enlightened, collectively or individually, so they are not caught unaware as they face multiple challenges. In this approach, the Pastoral caregiver will teach families the right way to use social media.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the pastoral care response to social media addiction in the Christian home. There is no doubt that the advent of information technology has brought a helping hand and a new face to the development of the way of life, but its addiction poses a threat to Christian families. Social media has given rise to various social networks that facilitate effective communication, interaction, and access to distant places. This enables couples, parents, and children who are not in the same location to get in contact without stress. But the negative side of social media manifests in the form of lying, addiction to social media, and other social maladjustments. A pastoral caregiver is employed to combat this menace. Therefore, Christian families, churches, and pastoral caregivers must work together to promote balanced and purposeful use of social media. Such an approach can enable families to benefit from technological advancement while preserving effective communication, meaningful family bonding, spiritual growth, and the values that contribute to a healthy Christian home.

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