

DIGITALIZATION: THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON GENERATION Z AND THE DECLINE OF FAMILY VALUES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to critically examine the term digitalization, and how social media has effected generation Z and contributed negatively to the erosion of traditional family values in Nigeria. In this digital era, technological advances have offered new chances for people to engage and communicate with one another. In fact, it is not an over statement to say that technology is the number one engine of prosperity. However, these technologies at the same time have introduced new difficulties, as certain formerly prohibited behaviours like homo sexual, Masturbation, pre-marital sex, occultism, cyber bullying, drug abuse, absent minded etc., have become common due to social media's widespread use. The findings reveal that while the advent of the digital age has brought unprecedented changes in the way Gen Z interacts and perceives the world, it has also contributed to the erosion of essential traditional family values and norms that have long been the cornerstone of societal cohesion. The views and values of today's youth are radically and unexpectedly different from those of their parents' and grandparents' generations due to the events and situations they are exposed to. The questions that propel this work are; Are morals and values really declining in Nigeria? Does embracing digital technology means abandoning our cultural values? Is globalization a blessing or curse to Nigerians? Employing the method of critical analysis, this paper argues that the rise of social media and the use of Smart phones have created a false sense of connection, exposed families to different cultures and values, and a culture of individualism, leading Gen Z's to a blurring of traditional family values and a loss of cultural identity. This paper concludes that digital technology should be harnessed to enhance our cultural preservation, promoting innovation that aligns with our traditions and practices.

Keywords: *Digital Age; Digitalization; Technological advances Gen Z; Traditional Values; Social Decay*

INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations, “Digital technologies have advanced more rapidly than any innovation in our history- reaching around 50 percent of the developing world’s population in only two decades and transforming societies”.(www.un.org) The truth remains that digital age no doubt has brought unprecedented changes and fantastic opportunities for people to engage and communicate with one another. No wonder Nwankwo (2025:157) in accentuating the gains of technological innovations states that the world as it is today, has really become a global village. Human society has redefined the way things are done, as new inventions emerge almost on daily basis. Man now finds it more convenient to gather and disseminate information, as well as, solve complex challenges that are hitherto, not easy to handle.

Digital technologies enhance connectivity, financial inclusion, access to trade and public services. Acemoglu and James Robinson in their book *Why Nations fail: The Origins of power, prosperity and poverty* argue that technology is one of the engines of prosperity (2012:77). For instance, in today’s world, access to the internet and the skills to use it has become vital for success in education, employment, and daily life. The duo concur that some nations are poor and are cut off from the benefits of this new era and remain further behind because of the absence of technological innovation which in their words is termed creative destruction, a term in economies which was first used by Joseph Schumpeter. However, despite the advances offered by digital age, it has at the same time introduced new difficulties and loss of traditional values. Nwankwo (2025:158) buttresses that the categories of information disseminated through social media can positively or negatively influence the users, and this equally has germane implication on the morality of the society, especially the youth.

Gen Z are increasingly influenced negatively by a plethora of digital elements, such as, Tik Tok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc., which often lead to the erosion of their time, character and innovative capacities. What we see as abomination in our society are the things our youths encourage and accommodate due to some fake and misleading posts and contents that are displayed on social media. For instance, the rate on how premarital sex, hook ups, pornography, abortion, masturbation, occultism, divorce, hard drugs, poor academic performance and other abnormal habits are being promoted on social media is seriously perturbing. The way sexual contents are being carelessly displayed on social media makes youths to generalize that sexuality is a normal way of life. That's why we have high rate of youths engaging into sexual acts before marriage and those taking hard drugs to get high.

Nigeria has so much regards for her culture. This is because, Nigerians see their culture as their identity, which defines and distinguished them from other climes. Unfortunately, the use of social media has negatively affected our youth's moral upbringing and traditional African values due to lack of control and exposure to these platforms. As Nwankwo (2025:158) puts it, the values of respect for elders, constituted authorities, honesty, industry, chastity, hardworking, uprightness, and regard for human life, are constantly being eroded due to the incursion and abuse of social media platforms.

To get rid of these negative effects of digital technologies, all hands must be on deck to encourage offline cultural engagement, digital literacy, active parental guidance and stronger platform safeguard. These will go a long way to checkmate all manner of debased moral behaviors seen in Gen Z lives.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Digital Age/ Digitalization

Digital age also known as “information age or era” is a period when the computer and internet were introduced. Collins Dictionary simply defines the digital age as a time when large amounts of information are widely available to many people, largely through computer technology (riskconnect.com). This period witnessed a rapid shift from traditional industry to computerization to artificial intelligence as a result of industrial revolution. It started during the 1980s till present. Digitalization on the hand is described as the process of purposefully moving from manual processes to digitized and automated processes. For instance, about thirty years ago, type writer, analog camera, rug, lantern, and chalk board etc., were in vogue. People had to travel far to post their letters at post offices and as well queue on lines only to call their loved one at NITEL. However, today all these things have been replaced by modern technologies. Phone has replaced NITEL and NIPOST. Laptop has replaced type-writing machine. Tiles has displaced rug, and projectors has displaced the use of chalk board.

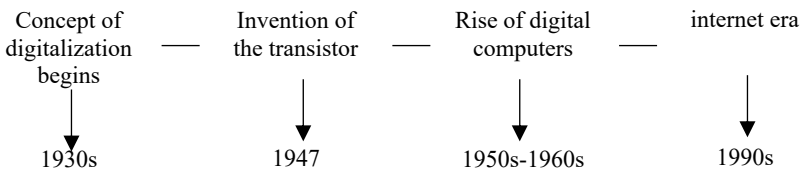
The benefits of digitalization are numerous as it helps in improving ones organization, making it to be more competitive. It takes away human error and can be used to speed up manual and repetitive tasks. Digitalization reduces costs, saves time and energy, guarantees consistency, improves production efficiency and enhances agility.

Digital Technology

Digital Technology is the backbone of modern innovation. It simply means the use of electronic systems to create, store, process, and communicate information, basically in digital format, through devices like computers. These technologies are; smart phones, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, social media, block chain, computers, EBooks, video streaming, E-commerce, augmented

reality, Digital cameras, game consoles, cyber security, etc. The advance of digital technology marked the beginning of the digital age, transforming industries and ways of life. Today, these technologies no doubt have brought a lot of positive changes by completely transforming the way people live and work over a short period of time. They have opened up new opportunities in fields such as education, medicine, and business. They have also enabled people to communicate information easily and rapidly. On education sector, most schools have improved digitally, the use of E-library, online- learning, AI and zoom meetings have really helped students and researchers to improve academically. It has helped unemployed youths to learn new skills like using AI to create stories, make contents, and as well get updated with current happenings. It has enabled youths to connect with expertise, sharing their experiences without having to see each other face to face. In banking sector, modern technology has created easy ways that enable customers to be attended with ease. People can now access their accounts with ease without visiting their banks.

The Evolution of Digital Technology



Social Media

Social media is a platform that enables mass dissemination of knowledge through modern means of communication. It is a highly influential online channel that connects global populations of individuals ranging from children to the elderly (author.com). In the words of Alysia, social media can be an avenue to express yourself, connect, learn, and share. Since the beginning of the 21st century, social media platforms have emerged not merely as technological

innovations but as fundamental forces reshaping human interaction, information flow, and societal structures.

However, social media is not entirely bad as most people think. However the negative side of it has lure some youths into cybercrimes. Today's youths see internet fraud as a way of making quick wealth. As social media's influence grows, posts that promote hate speech, fake news, desire for sex, violence against individuals, misinformation, cultural insensitivity, use of vulgar language and idolatry are now current trends and happenings on social media.

Understanding the phrase Generation Z

The phrase Generation Z comprises of those born between 1995 and 2009. These are the children of the youngest Baby Boomers and Generation X members (aithor.com). They are the first fully global generation shaped in the 21st century, connected through digital devices, and engaged through social media. Generational Z grew up with social media that provided a constant update on what friends have been doing. What differentiates Gen Z and Gen Alpha is that while the former adapted to technology as it developed, the latter is digitally empowered generation. Alpha Generation is the successor to Gen Z. They are born between 2010 and 2025.

Generation Z's have unique characteristics and Perspectives that set them apart from previous generations.

They are entrepreneurial: Research shows that Generational Z are the most entrepreneurial generation in history. This generation values independence and flexibility in their work life. They are creative. Always eager to create something new and better suited to the digital age.

They are digital integrators: They have integrated technology seamlessly into their lives. They are digitally connected. It is almost like the air they breathe.

They are truly global: Gen Z is the first generation to be truly global. Music, Movies and Celebrities are more global for them than they have been for previous generations. They understand the power of collaborating and forming diverse and committed communities.

Gen Z are social more than any other generation. Today's youths are extensively connected to and shaped by their peers due to social media. They are socially conscious and capable of developing their skills at speed and being innovative.

Mobile: Gen Z's are not only mobile in terms of using technology constantly. They are also moving homes, jobs, and careers faster than ever before.

Visual: Gen Z's can watch videos; in fact, research has it that almost 5 billion videos are watched on YouTube every day.

They value financial stability, ambition and goal-oriented mindset.

They cannot do without phones. They are always on line, searching for information from one social media platform to another.

How Social Media is negatively affecting Generation Z and eroding traditional Values in Nigeria

Traditional Values refer to the beliefs, morals, and principles that have been passed down through generations within a society, often reflecting the cultural and historical heritage of that society. These include: love, empathy, and respect for elders, integrity, strong family bonds, trust, hard work, discipline, self-confidence and moral courage. These values enumerated here are well regarded in traditional African Society. However, the fact that social media has negatively eroded these values can never be denied, this is because, Nigerian youths, basically Gen Z are being carried away by

misleading information and fake lives they watch and immitate on social media. Through the use of social media a lot of immoral acts happen in our society on daily basis. Muhammad (2023:4) avers that teenagers at very tender ages are not only exposed to sexual contents but they are they are frequently exposed. These sexual contents are seen in YouTube and Facebook platforms. This exposure to unrealistic sexual contents and others have caused serious damage to our culture.

Negative Impacts of Social media on Gen Z

Lack of respect: This is one of the challenges of social media among Gen Z. This is because social media is a platform design for both young and old, rich and poor, literates and illiterates, most young people now use that as a means to talk or respond messages in a disrespected way. Most misleading information and abuses on social media are all the handwork of the Gen Z. The digital age has made it easier to avoid face to face interactions, which are essential for developing empathy, making it more challenging for Gen Z to develop empathy for others. The anonymity of online interactions can lead to a lack of respect for others.

Digital addiction and overexposure to explicit content: Gen Z's excessive use of digital technologies can lead to addiction and social isolation. It can also lead to student's academic poor performance because students who find themselves in such condition will always be lazy to read their books or make researches. Some of these social media platforms like Facebook, Tik Tok, YouTube etc., expose young people to pornographic materials and gambling. This is why masturbation, lesbianism, homo-sexuality, hook-ups, infidelity which are so rare and abomination are now so common among the youths in Nigeria.

Comparison and Anxiety: Social media platforms showcase the highlight reels of others' lives, leading to unrealistic comparisons

and increased anxiety. Many young people develop anxiety and feeling of worthlessness after being exploited online.

Loss of critical thinking: The constant stream of information can make it challenging for Gen Z to develop critical thinking skills.
Brain Drain: This is another serious negative effect of social media. Youths of today find it difficult to study due to excessive stay on social media trying to access information or create contents, and this is why the level of educational backwardness among the students is very high. These young people over stress their brains, and even when they try to read, it will not assimilate, this leads to poor academic performance and laziness.

Loss of Value for Human: Respect for human life is constantly being eroded in Nigeria due to social media. Youths of today do not have human heart. We have seen in many occasions when young people prefer to record accident victims for content instead of taking them to the nearest hospital for their survival. This inhumane act has taken a lot of lives, even when the victims are crying for help, people who are supposed to offer humanitarian help record and document events for online attention. This according to Nwankwo (2025:161) shows the callous exploitation of tragic events and occurrences for content creation and online attention.

Spiritual Decline: Many youths are spiritually empty and dead due to lack of self-control as a result of what they watch on social media. There are a lot of pages on Facebook that encourage sex. Once you mistakenly click on those contents, posts of such kind will be popping in, and this creates barriers to living a life of fulfillment and peace. Fake pastors who pretend to be real men of God have used social media to deceive many people.

Quick Money Syndrome and High nature of Materialism: The quest for quick money has lure many youths into rituals and occultism. Gen Z wants to make quick money. They don't care how it comes.

They believe that the end justifies the means. Salamatu (2021) states that most African youths are in a rat race to get rich fast and this mostly is as a result of how their peers and online *Dibias* display wealth on social media. Ezeador and Okolisah (2024:109) observe that the present day youths grew with the mentality that money is everything. Most people post fake houses, exotic cars, expensive wears, shoes and wigs. This has made some young people to develop jealous and envious without regards to where to where the wealth comes from. The arrest of popular online celebrity native doctors, Chukwudozie Nwangwu popularly known as *Akwa Okuko tiwara aki* in Anambra State is a typical example.

Missing out on Face to Face Relationship: This is another dangerous effect of social media on Gen Z. Social media has replaced time with friends and family. Youths of today spend more time on internet. For this reason, the time to visit their friends and relations is the time they spend accessing internet. The culture of brotherhood and unity that defined our people is no longer a priority.

Pressure to gain followers: This generation of young people feel pressured to create contents that will attract likes, followers, or validation, so they will do anything possible to gain likes even if it is showing their nakedness.

Recommendation

Technology, despite its pitfalls has brought a lot of significant growth and changes in human lives and the way things are done in the world at large. Nigeria is developing economically, politically, educationally and socially is because of technological innovation. Nigeria cannot have sustainable development without technology, and social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of many users, especially the youths. So, to protect this generation from harmful effects of digital technology and also to preserve our

culture and values from eroding, this research recommends that Nigerian government must create a level playing field for Nigerian youths to innovate. An idle mind they said is a devil's workshop. If Nigerian government can create jobs for youths, these abnormal habits will drastically reduce. Parents, should actively monitor and guide the activities of their children online. It is the duty of the parents to show their children how to use social media responsibly. Social media has good and bad side. The good side should be promoted and encouraged because it is what brings sustainable development and the bad side must as a matter of fact be jettisoned because it brings destruction.

CONCLUSION

No doubt, technology has come to stay. The digital age has created a dilemma for Gen Z, offering numerous benefits while eroding traditional values. This research examined digital technology and highlights its negative effects on Gen Z and family values. This paper observes that digitalization has now become one of the major reasons for the decline of values, norms and morals in our society, as it has lure youths into different kinds of immorality such as gambling, hook-ups, occultism and *oke-ite* practices. Parents, educators, religious leaders, government, and other critical stakeholders, as a matter of urgency, must all play their roles and ensure they confront this challenge to protect this generation from falling into the traps of this digital age. Strict regulation on internet sites must be carried out to ensure that contents that are not teenage friendly are not posted. Again, parents must ensure that they inculcate good values to these generation and at the same time control the way they access these platforms on social media. Failure to do so will lead to culture death, insecurity and erosion of values.

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