

CHALLENGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND NETWORKING FOR COUNSELLING IN THE PREVENTION OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Issues discussed in this paper include youth restiveness, provision of guidance and counselling services via social media as a new era for therapeutic communication, salient counselling ethical and professional code of practice in relation to use of social media for counselling. The paper also views youth restiveness as a dysfunctional, emotional behaviour mainly due to individual temperamental disposition to events or situations which can be prevented or managed through counselling intervention using social media and networking. However, there are inherent challenges in using social media and networking for counselling. The major challenge is that social media has ability to blur the boundaries between private and public information hereby eroding clients' trust, acceptance, and confidentiality of the counselling process; posing serious legal and ethical problem for counsellors if not professionally handled. The paper therefore recommends eclectic counselling intervention strategy as an appropriate technique to be utilised for this purpose

Keywords: Social media, Networking. Counselling, Youth restiveness

Introduction

The 21st Century has ushered in technological advances that have changed the way people communicate with one another and social media is one of the fastest growing means of communication especially among youths. Bratt (2010) asserts that, one of the most noteworthy of these changes in communication is the birth of social networking websites and their rising popularity around the world. Bratt further observes that social network sites allow members to post personal information, share picture, and connect with other users with similar interests, all with an often-perceived sense of anonymity. In this vein, Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2006) describe social networks as spaces for individuals to present themselves and express their social networks.

Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Social networking, on the other hand, is a social structure with people who are joined by a common interest. At this point, the definition of social media seems like an oversimplification. In the last several years,

technology has brought us very far from where we started and social media almost seems like it is an entirely different animal. Social media and social networking have been instrumental in many major events around the world. It is fair to say that social networking is a subcategory of social media. Many people think that social media and social networking are one and the same and therefore can be used interchangeably. That is a misconception. It is a good idea to look at the differences between the two here and walk away with a clear understanding of the differences.

The main purpose of social networking is to connect with other people. There are other end results that come from those connections on many occasions, such as revenue, for example. Some people argue that social networking came before social media and some others believe that it was the other way around. The foundation of social networking is basically the human side.

Despite the phenomenal growth and rising popularity of social media and networking, their abilities to blur the boundaries between private and public information cannot be underestimated. Posting personal information, sharing pictures, and

connecting with other users with similar interests, with often-perceived sense of anonymity via social and networking pose serious challenge to the protection of the client's disclosed confidential information during counselling process. Although using social media and networking for counselling and mentoring at a distance, can make or mar counselling process if not professionally managed, counselling remains a vital and viable tool for preventing/managing youth restiveness. To shed more light on the topic, the paper in its subsequent sections, discusses issues pertaining to: youth restiveness, definition of social media, and networking as a new era for therapeutic communication, salient counselling ethical and professional code of practice guiding the use of social media and networking. The immediate section of this paper would therefore be addressing the issue of youth restiveness.

Youth Restiveness

The United Nations General Assembly and World Bank defines the youth as people between ages 15 to 24 years (Ukwueze, 2013). In Nigeria, the concept of youth as encapsulated in the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), are people within the age limit of 30 years; thus, facilitating their participation in the scheme. The writers of this paper will rely on definition encapsulated in the National Youth Service Corp Scheme, as the operational definition of youth. According to Ukwueze (2013), there are currently 1.2 billion youth in the world, the largest number of youths ever to have existed and majority of these youth live in developing countries.

Causes of Youth Restiveness

A number of studies have identified factors responsible for youth restiveness. Bratt (2010) identifies three major factors: the peer motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, and perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation.

Another study carried out in Niger Delta region by Bratt (2010) identified lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of good governance, corrupt practices of government officials, inadequate training programmes, unemployment, inadequate recreational facilities, lack of quality education, and so on, as the reasons for incessant youth

restiveness. This implies that catalogues of closely related factors are responsible for youth restiveness.

Bad Governance

Good governance is required for the growth and development of any nation. Unfortunately, in Nigeria bad governance is more common than good, resulting in disjointed development. The Igbo and Ikpa (2013) identifies the main characteristics of bad governance to include:

1. failure to properly distinguish between what is public and what is private, leading to private appropriation of otherwise public resources.
2. inability to establish a predictable framework for law and government behaviour in a manner conducive to development, or arbitrariness in the application of laws and rules;
3. excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirement and so forth which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking;
4. priorities that are inconsistent with development, thereby resulting in misallocation of national resources; and
5. exceedingly narrow base for, or non-transparent, decision making.

These and more are the features of most administration in Nigeria. For instance, Bratt (2010) observes that successive administrations in Nigeria have not allocated much to the needs of the youth, and, worse still, the meagre allocation are often diverted by government officials to their private accounts and projects. Thus, youth are restive and agitated when they perceive that resources meant for them are being wasted by those in authority.

Unemployment

Unemployment is a hydra-headed monster which exists among the youth in all developing countries. Experts believe that the number of jobless youths is twice as high as official estimate. Bratt, (2010) notes Nigerian youth are trapped by unemployment. Igbo and Ikpa (2013) believes that "the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in African countries have made them vulnerable to the manipulations of agents' provocateurs". These include aggrieved

politicians, religious demagogues, and greedy multinationals that employ these youths to achieve their selfish ambitions. Igbo and Ikpa (2013) strongly believes that the absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences.

Poverty

Poverty connotes inequality and social injustice, and this traumatizes the poor. More than 70 percent of people in Nigeria are in abject poverty, living below the poverty line, and one- third survive on less than US \$1 dollar a day (Zakaria, 2006). This figure includes an army of youth in urban centres in Nigeria who struggle to eke out a living by hawking chewing sticks, bottled water, handkerchiefs, belts, etc. The sales-per-day and the profit margin on such goods are so small that they can hardly live above the poverty line. Disillusioned, frustrated, and dejected, they seek an opportunity to express their anger against the state. Akume (2011) and Igbo and Ikpa (2013) agreed that there is a link among poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality, and youth restiveness as evidenced by the numerous violent protests against the wielders of power in Nigeria.

Inadequate Educational Opportunities and Resources

Quality education has a direct bearing on national prestige, greatness, and cohesion. The knowledge and skill that young people acquire help determine their degree of patriotism and contribution to national integration and progress. Between 2000 and 2004, about 30 percent of Nigerian youth between 10 and 24 were not enrolled in secondary school. Perhaps the prohibitive cost of acquiring education is responsible (Akume, 2011).

The aftereffect of this situation is that thousands of young people roam the streets in cities in Nigeria. Those who manage to complete secondary school have no opportunities for tertiary education. Having been denied the chance to reach their potential, they are disorientated and readily available for antisocial actions (Bratt, 2010).

Worse still, some who struggle to enrol in various educational institutions drop out due to lack of basic learning facilities. This situation is attributable to the dwindling resources of

government at both federal and state levels because of an economic meltdown.

Lack of Basic Infrastructure

Most rural communities and urban slums in Nigeria have no access to potable water, health facilities, electricity, communication facilities, industries, and commercial facilities, etc. Behind social unrest and youth restiveness in the country is the agitation for equitable distribution of resources.

Inadequate Communication and Information flow

Communication creates room for sharing information. It helps people express their thoughts and feelings, clarify problems, and consider alternative ways of coping or adapting to their situation. Such sharing promotes social cohesion.

People must have access to communication facilities, to communicate with the people making the decisions that affect them. Sadly, rarely do people in Nigeria participate in decision-making processes on issues that affect their lives. Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2005), in their study of Niger Delta, revealed that inadequate communication and information flow is one factor responsible for youth restiveness in the area.

What Are Social Media and Networking?

The word media means a medium of cultivation, conveyance, or expression. Media is also a plural form of medium and a medium is a particular form or system of communication (Bratt, 2010). Social media on one hand, is the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Social networking on the other hand, is the use of web-based technology that allows the exchange of user-generated content; in other words, meaning that ordinary people can create, share, and comment on information on a variety of platforms. Social networking provides means for users to interact over the internet. (Haenlein, 2010). Social network service is usually an individual- centred service whereas online community services are group-centred, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) point out that, social networking depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share,

co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

Whereas social media sites take many different forms, and they incorporate new information and communication tools such as magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, social network, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking; technologies include blogging, picture-sharing, logs, wall-posting, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice over IP, to name a few to name a few (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). In a nutshell, the paper attempts to explore perceived problems and challenges of using social networking for prevention/management of youth restiveness for counselling regardless of their different forms Over the years social media has taken over the internet. It has advanced and grown so much over the past few years that most businesses and organizations have a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a blog and/or a LinkedIn (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). According to Haenlein and Kaplan, (2010), many companies even implement these tools into their websites so that visitors can get more connected to the company and join in on the conversations.

Social Media and Networking as a Paradigm for Client Communication

Ukwueze (2013) observes that, there are about 33 million teenagers between ages 13 to 19 in the United States who use social media as means of communication. Citing survey reports of Kaiser who surveyed 8- to 18-year-olds, while Pew's data covers ages 12 to 17 and other various studies with different age cohorts, Ukwueze (2013) drew some common trends. Among these are:

- a) Social networking also has soared in importance. Along with mobile use, it has become indispensable and ubiquitous in most teens' lives in the last few years, more so for older teens than younger ones,
- b) Youth split their enormous media time among many activities such as social networking, viewing video, exchanging Instant Messages, viewing graphics and photos, listening to music, watching TV, playing games, looking up things, even catching up on the news – often simultaneously. Likewise, they divide their media usage among many platforms: cell

phones, MP3 players, gaming devices, televisions, computers, and printed materials. They use different devices for different purposes in different places.

Dilemma of Using Social Media and Networking for Counselling in Nigeria

With the emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education including online counselling, especially within educational institutions' learning management systems in developing countries such as Nigeria, it becomes imperative to create necessary awareness of professional ethical challenges associated with it. The launching of Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) in 2001, Nigerians now enjoy services like mobile Television, POS (Electronic payment) affordable internet services, cheaper international calls, internet banking and mobile banking. Millions of Nigerians now can access the internet via their GSM phones, or a GSM enabled device. Many Nigerians are on the Facebook, Yahoo, Gmail, Twitter, and Google with millions of them visiting these sites everyday especially the youth. Counsellors who wish to use social media and networking are now faced with the challenge of establishing effective boundaries between private and public information. Social media has created new salient issues that need to be critically examined with regards to their benefits and challenges for its use as a viable tool for counselling. However, social media has opened many different doors for counsellors; opportunities that may not have been available had social media not taken off (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010).

With all the rapid changes that have taken place in social media in the 21st Century, Kolmes, Nagel and Anthony (2010) posits that the helping profession as a whole is still trying to answer questions on how to implement these tools into everyday activities and communications. According to him, the American Counselling Association which focuses on the advancement of the counselling profession, its current code of ethics does not reflect the advances in social media and networking. He says, the code was last revised in 2005, which is before social media started affecting most professions. Kolmes *et al* (2010) also express optimism, that, a new and

revised code of ethics will be out in 2014 which will include various types of social media entries in it.

Moreover, the easy access to publicly posted private information raises several professional and ethical concerns for helping professionals. While the use of online social networks offers advantages to counsellors, including tools for maintaining relationships with people living great distances away, precautionary measures must be taken. According to Bratt (2010), unfortunately, the ethical implications of using online social networks has received little attention in the professional counselling literature, while other disciplines, including nursing, medicine, pharmacy, and education, have discussed this topic to a greater extent (e.g., Cain, 2008; Cain *et al*, 2009; McBride & Cohen, 2009; and Ukwueze, 2013), their use can also raise serious issues around boundaries and ethical personal conduct (Boyd, 2007). Counselling codes of ethics revealed that issues surrounding online social networking are not addressed in the American Counselling Association Code of Ethics (2005), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy (2010), the Australian Counselling Association Code of Conduct (2008), or in the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's Code of Ethics (2007) or Standards of Practice for Counsellors (2008) (Kaplan, 2010).

Many counselling practitioners might be motivated to use social media and networking for counselling, without being aware of deleterious consequences of breaching the ethical code of counselling profession and blurring the boundaries between personal and professional lives if not properly handled. Though Kolmes *et al* (2010) succinctly observes that, it is ethical for counsellors to use social media if inherent ethical issues are properly and adequately addressed.

Despite the revolution of communication through social media, counselling practitioners should understand that it is their primary obligation to protect their clients' confidentiality and must also protect confidential information stored in any medium. Meanwhile, the paper highlighted briefly salient issues of social media interactions and counselling ethical and professional code of

practice in networking. Issues so discussed include self-disclosure, personal and professional boundaries; self-disclosure and personal and professional boundaries; multiple relationship; issues of confidentiality; encryption; and caution for counsellors during online interaction with clients which includes testimonials; informed consent; minimizing Intrusions on Privacy; and initiating professional relationships and documenting and maintaining records.

Self-Disclosure, Personal and Professional Boundaries

One of the salient challenges of using social media and networking for counselling and mentoring is how to handle unintentional self-disclosure and keeping to personal and professional boundaries while using social media. Self-disclosure is defined as the revelation of personal, rather than professional information by a therapist to a client (Zur *et al*, 2010). Counsellors are advised to maintain a level of control over personal disclosures made by way of direct interpersonal interactions (Corey *et al*, (2011). Because online social networks are essentially forums for broadcasting personal information, the use of these sites increases the likelihood of counsellors engaging in unintentional disclosures. A common and simple way for clients to accomplish this is by joining social networks, such as Facebook (www.facebook.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com), or Twitter (www.twitter.com).

To effectively address the potential harm due to unintentional self-disclosures, counsellors and other helping professionals must be aware that, all their online postings may be viewed by their clients, and those postings may stay online, in some form, forever (Zur *et al*, 2010). Hoser and Nitschke, (2010) suggest that peer consultation, documentation of online activity, and intentionality may be the best methods that counsellors have to protect themselves and their clients from the harm that may result from online self-disclosures.

Multiple Relationships

In counselling, multiple relationships are defined as those in which a therapist is in a professional role with a person in addition to another role with that same individual, or with another person who is close to that individual. Multiple relationships are

generally discouraged, although no code of ethics states that nonsexual multiple relationships with clients are inherently unethical (Corey *et al.*, 2011). Most professional codes of ethics warn against these types of relationships because of the potential for the impairment of counsellors' judgement, their ability to render effective services, or the potential to cause harm or exploitation to clients (Corey *et al.*, 2011). Ultimately, counsellors are discouraged from engaging in multiple relationships with clients because it minimizes their potential to uphold the fundamental principles on which counselling ethics reside. Ukwueze (2013) warns of the danger of self-disclosure when professionals are friends with their clients on social networks.

Another salient factor that deserves serious attention is the issue of personal vs. counsellors' behaviours on the Web. According to Nagel and Anthony (2009), counsellors should be aware of the implications of discussing clinical issues within their social networks in Tweets, status updates, and blog posts, and they should be aware that messages may be read by wide networks of non-professionals. In the same vein, counsellors should be aware that even masked data may provide enough detail to potentially identify a client. Counsellors should also be aware that messages posted on personal and professional networks may be archived and seen by other parties to whom they are not authorized to release confidential information, and they adjust their behaviour accordingly. Online case consultation that reflects client material, even with the record appropriately blinded, should occur in encrypted (or equivalent) environments only.

Nagel and Anthony, (2009) posit that counsellors should let clients know whether they utilize search engines as a standard means of collecting client information, whether this is done routinely as part of care, or whether there are particular circumstances (i.e., emergencies) in which they may obtain this information. Counsellors should document such activity in clients' charts if this is an aspect of providing counselling service and/or assessment.

Interacting using email, SMS, @replies, and other onsite messaging systems is another important factor to be considered: Nagel and Anthony, (2009)

observe that counsellors should be aware that third-party services that offer direct messaging often provide limited security and privacy. Counsellors should remain vigilant that communicating on such systems with clients may expose confidential client data to third parties. Counsellors should inform clients at the beginning of counselling session about appropriate ways to contact them and let clients know that if they choose to send messages on these networks, these messages may be intercepted by others. (Nagel & Anthony, 2009) posit that counsellors should be aware that all messages exchanged with clients may become a part of the clinical and legal record, even issues such as change of contact information or scheduling appointments. All therapeutic communication should offer encryption security or the equivalent. Counsellors should define the record according to the laws of their jurisdiction and according to their defined professional scope of practice.

A consumer review site is another factor to be considered in using social media and networking for counselling and mentoring of youth. Counsellors should be aware that their practices may show up on various consumer review sites and that clients may perceive a listing as a request for a review. Counsellors should not ask clients to leave reviews. Counsellor must understand that they cannot respond to any reviews in any way confirming whether someone is or was a therapy client (Nagel & Anthony, 2009).

Issue of Confidentiality

Another important factor to be considered the issue of confidentiality of the client's disclosed information while using social media and networking for counselling and mentoring at a distance. Within the counselling realm, confidentiality is defined as a fundamental ethical responsibility to take every reasonable precaution to respect and safeguard a client's disclosed information. Counsellors must understand that it is their primary obligation to protect client confidential information stored in any medium (Bratt, 2010). While the importance for helping professionals to maintain confidentiality throughout their conventional everyday interpersonal interactions, (Corey *et al.*, 2011), only recently has confidentiality become an issue about online

conduct (McBride & Cohen, 2009; Ukwueze (2013). Some authors suggest that the perceived sense of anonymity when using online social networks can result in a blurring of the boundaries between acceptable and risky personal and professional behaviour (McBride & Cohen, 2009), could have negative consequences for that client. Easy access to publicly posted private information poses eminent threat to confidentiality of the client's disclosed information.

Encryption

The informed consent process includes a formal acknowledgement from the client to the practitioner. Therefore, clear, and precise information is accessible via the practitioner's website. This acknowledgement is received via encrypted channels. An explanation about the use of encryption for therapeutic exchanges and lack of encryption if/when unencrypted methods (standard email, forum posts, mobile telephone, SMS texting, social networking) are used for issues such as appointment changes and cancellations.

In the vein, the practitioner's privacy policy should include in the Informed Consent process and information about how email addresses, credit card information and client records are used, shared, or stored. Applicable information regarding privacy and confidentiality that is required for patient consent in the geographic location of the practitioner should also be included in the Informed Consent process (Nagel & Anthony, 2009).

Caution for Counsellors during online interaction with clients

As pointed out by Nagel and Anthony (2009) counsellors should avoid the following activities while interacting with a client or clients on the networks.

Testimonials

Counsellors should not solicit testimonials from current clients or others who may be vulnerable to undue influence. Uninformed Consent: When practitioners conduct therapy, counselling, or consultation services in person or via electronic means, they must obtain the informed consent of the individual or an individual using their services, in language that is easily understood. Informed consent includes information about the nature and

course of treatment, fees, involvement of third parties, and limits of confidentiality. Clients must also be given sufficient opportunity to ask questions and receive answers about services.

Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy

Counsellors should not, discuss confidential information on listservs or status updates on their social networking profiles. Practitioners discuss confidential material only for appropriate scientific or professional purposes and only with persons who are clearly related to their work (e.g., formal clinical consultation that is documented and that takes place in private settings, not publicly archived settings). Details of disclosure in the case of research or consultation should be discussed during the informed consent process.

Initiating Professional Relationships

Practitioners are aware that confidential relationships do not take place in public, and they should make efforts to minimize any intrusions on privacy including, but not limited to social networks, people contacting them in public forums (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blog comments, etc.). They should make efforts to channel these conversations to a private forum without drawing attention to the fact that they are being contacted for professional services.

Documenting and Maintaining Records

Practitioners should create, maintain, and store records related to their professional work to facilitate counselling processes by them or other professionals and to ensure compliance with legal requirements. Counselling practitioners may also share professional space on various professional social networks or listservs.

Conclusion

Despite the viability of using social media and networking for counselling purposes, possibility of social media and networking blurring the boundaries between private and public information is a stake reality. Counsellors must be cautious and use their best judgment when communicating through these channels. Nevertheless, counsellors should have sufficient understanding and be guided of their Ethics, Codes and can integrate how social media relate to professional conduct online.

Recommendations

It is advisable for counsellors who intend to use social media and networking for counselling and mentoring youth should:

1. Provide a written social media policy and consent form that clients must sign
2. Use privacy settings on social media accounts whenever possible
3. Check with state licensing board to stay current on rules and regulations
4. Have separate social media accounts for your professional and private life Blogs, LinkedIn, webinars, skill pages and RSS feeds are a few examples of tools counsellors can use to get connected with one another.
5. The counsellor should be wary of the main issue with these media remains, which is invasion of privacy or a break of confidentiality

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