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# **Social Media and the Moral Development of Adolescent Pupils: Soulmates or Antagonists?**

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## **Abstract**

*Since the turn of the new millennium Zimbabwe has experienced extensive expansion of Internet access through desktop computers, laptops and cell phones. These gadgets have led to the phenomenal rise in the use of social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Skype as e-learning resources. Undergirded by situational analysis, Kohlberg's theory of moral development and unhu/ubuntu moral philosophy, this article interrogates the impact of this rapid growth of social media networks, as e-learning resources, on the moral development of adolescent pupils in Harare (Zimbabwe). Data were gathered through document analysis, interviews and focus group discussions with adolescent pupils, students, teachers and parents. The study established that pupils' interaction with social media platforms is largely detrimental to their moral development. Given that the abuse of Internet by adolescents and other social groups who interact with them is a serious matter that inhibits moral development of pupils, this article calls for unhu/ubuntu based cyber interactions, as well as, the enactment of cyber smart legal frameworks which protect adolescents. The article also advocates a curriculum that balances technology with moral education.*

## **Introduction**

Steeped within the broader discourse of morality and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), this article interrogates the impact of social media networks on the moral development of adolescent pupils in Zimbabwe. Social media networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, Hootsuite, the Lounge, Flickr, and Viber have become popular forms of communication among Zimbabweans and in particular, adolescents in the past few years. The growth in social media networks has been boosted by the introduction of 3G and 4G communication networks

which enable mobile users to message instantly and browse the internet. These platforms have evolved to become mainstream sources of news, information and social interaction. In this regard, the Marketers Association of Zimbabwe Report (2012) points out that over 1million Zimbabweans are on Facebook. Similarly, statistics that were released by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) in December 2012 shows that the country's mobile penetration stands at 97% up from 85% in June 2012 (Kabweza, 2012). The same report noted that Zimbabwe's tele-density (a measure of the number of active mobile phone SIM cards and landlines as a percentage of the country's total population) has reached 100%.

These developments are in tandem with the local, regional and international legal instruments such as Section 20 of the Zimbabwean constitution which promote children's rights to access and impart information. Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emphasises the child's right to freedom of expression which includes receiving and imparting information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers and through any media of the child's choice ([www.justiceforchildrentrust.org.zw](http://www.justiceforchildrentrust.org.zw), accessed on 19 July 2013). Furthermore, article 7 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) provides for the right to freedom of expression for children ([www.justiceforchildrentrust.org.zw](http://www.justiceforchildrentrust.org.zw), accessed on 19 July 2013).

In light of these developments, it can be posited that ICT has overshadowed traditional methods and practices of socialising adolescents especially in urban areas. Traditionally, the family and the entire community played a significant role in ensuring that adolescents grow up into morally upright and responsible citizens. Rituals, myths, omens and taboos were put in place to ensure that moral boundaries were maintained and respected. These cultural assets were employed, for example, in teaching adolescents the meaning of marriage and the importance of keeping their sexual purity until they got married. This socialisation was part and parcel of the indigenous African education which according to Matsika (2012, p. 126) helped the adolescents "...to read and interpret their experiences in accordance with societal norms."

The education culminated in holistic knowledge which “...is not compartmentalised into theoretical and practical, intellectual and emotional, secular and sacred or materialist and spiritual” (Matsika, 2012, p.129).

However, the avalanche of ICT has inevitably presented an external point of control in which the local adolescents' morals, attitudes and reactions are being shepherded by foreigners. Social media, which adolescent pupils access through various e-learning resources, has provided a platform for the youths to 'buy in' to some morally detrimental moral ideas. To this end Rukuni (2007) avers that Europe's moral libertinism, which predominate social media networks, has exerted external pressure and control on the behaviours of the adolescents.

### **Problem statement**

E-learning denotes the use of ICT to enhance and support learning. E-learning resources have given rise to media convergence, a situation whereby different media technologies are combined and mediated through fewer digital devices (Kung, Picard, and Tower, 2008 in Fox 2012:202). The use of social media, as e-learning resources, is being propelled by the observations that ICT leads to improved quality of teaching and learning as pupils use technology to take a more active role in personalising their own education while teachers become facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge. While the role of ICT in enhancing quality education cannot be doubted, it is unfortunate that the impact of these cyber developments on the moral development of Zimbabwe's adolescent learners have been barely researched from a moral perspective, a gap this article intends to fill. Scholars who include Meyrowitz (1985), Jenkins (1996), and McCullagh (2002) largely focus on how mass media and Internet shape peoples' social identities. Zengeya (2008), Chitanana (2009), Anderson (2001) and Fox (2012) seem to glorify Internet and social media usage among students and youths in Zimbabwe, America and Namibia respectively. Furthermore, the area of morality/ethics/*unhu-ubuntu* has been studied independently from ICT or social media by scholars such as Makuva (2010), Chumachawazungu (2010), Mangena (2006), and Sibanda and

Maposa (2013). Kohlberg and Piaget (cited in Moran, 1983) have done the same.

Instead, the question of how Internet/social media usage intersects adolescent pupils' moral development has been intermittently reported by news reporters. This means there is no serious academic research that has been carried out with regard to this subject, particularly within the Zimbabwean context. This article fills the existing knowledge gap by answering the following questions: What moral shifts are being aided by E-Learning resources such as the social media? Is cyber-based immorality (if any) complementing or replacing physical forms of moral decadence? Are theories of moral development such as Kohlberg's, still relevant in this digital age? By borrowing foreign technologies without contextualising them, are we not building our houses from the roof? Before answering these questions it is important to unpack concepts that informed this study and these are adolescence and morality.

### **Adolescence**

Rogers (1972) posits that etiologically the word adolescence comes from a Latin word 'adolescere' meaning to grow into maturity. It is an important process in which the youths achieve basic attitudes, values and beliefs needed for their meaningful and effective participation in the wide society. Epps and Hollin (1993) as well as Koovakkai and Muhammed (2010) note that adolescence is a period of physical and mental transition in which boys and girls experience identity crisis as they strive to achieve their own distinct personality. Museka and Kaguda (2013) agree that adolescence is associated with egocentricity and vulnerability as teenagers vacillate between ecstatic vibrancy and crushing ennui. It is a period of intense emotional change as they make a transition from childhood to adulthood and risk adventures are part and parcel of this transition. Furthermore, McCullagh (2002) observes that adolescents are good 'copy cats'.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) identifies adolescents as young people aged between 10 and 19 (UNICEF Report Number10, 2012). This age range places adolescents into level two of Kohlberg's theory of

moral development, that is, conventional morality (9-20 years). Children at this conventional level are morally orientation in two ways, that is, good boy-nice girl orientation/interpersonal concordance and law and order orientation (Moran, 1983). In the first stage (which is critical in this study), children tend to conform to individual expectations and social pressures. As such, they strive to maintain, support and justify the social order in which they live. At this stage, good behaviour is that which pleases and helps others. Actions are judged and determined by what pleases others as boys and girls conform to the societal conventions. The person operating at this phase seeks to conform to majority opinion of what is 'good' or 'nice'.

Although individuals in this stage are beginning to realise the social basis of their behaviour, they still lack a systematic perspective of morality. Their major quest is to live up to the expectations of others, follow the rules, and maintain a 'good' reputation. Kohlberg believes that most people reach and remain at this level. In the next stage, orientation to law and order, children are primarily concerned with authority, rules, and maintenance of the social order. Fear of blame for the failure to abide by fixed rules and laws motivate their behaviour. These observations are critical to this study because they provoke questions such as, do adolescents interact with social media and behave as they do online or offline in order to please their counterparts? How these stages of moral development intersect with the condition of being an adolescent in the digital world forms the thrust of this study.

Given that adolescence is a fundamental formative period in which pupils develop their core values, beliefs, sense of identity and understanding of their place in the world (UNICEF Report Number 10, 2012), it is important to investigate how their interaction with the social media networks interfere with these processes. This means an appreciation of all their diverse interactions, including virtual interaction, is important in order to understand their moral development.

### **Morality**

In this article, morality is used to refer to the human behaviour which is based on what a particular society considers to be ethically right or

wrong. Thus, Matsika (2012, p. 118) avers that morality has to do with the way human relations are conducted. In the Zimbabwean and African context morality is rooted in the philosophy of *unhu/ubuntu*. *Unhu/Ubuntu* refers to “a collective personhood and responsibility in which humanity can only be realised through sound relationships with others” (Museka, Phiri, Kaguda & Manyarara, 2013, p. 21). Similarly, *The Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training* (1999, p. 62) defines *unhu* as “a concept that denotes a good human being, a well behaved and morally upright person, characterised by qualities such as responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, hard work, integrity, a cooperative spirit, solidarity, hospitality, devotion to family and the welfare of the community.”

Though what is considered right in one society can be wrong in another, morals are checks and balances of a society which determine the rightness/goodness or wrongness/badness of an act. In this regard, Museka, et al (2013) aver that individuals who are well grounded in *unhu/ubuntu* moral tradition are not only socially disciplined and responsible but opt to remain 'true to self' irrespective of the prevailing socio-economic dynamics, which may include the influx of social media networks.

Before delving into how adolescence, morality and social media intersect, it is important to shed light on the setting, methodology and the theoretical framework that undergirded this study as well as the setting and methods employed in collecting data.

## **Methodology**

### **Setting, theoretical considerations and data gathering techniques**

In examining the impact of 'new' patterns of social media on the development of moral behaviour of adolescents in Zimbabwe, this article takes a situational approach. This approach, as argued by Meyrowitz (1985), explores how individuals and groups have changed their social (in this case moral) behaviours to match the situation perceived to be prevailing. The approach enables an interrogation of the ways in which moral behaviour is shaped by social situations such as the influx of social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, etc.



The assumption being that the influx of social media has precipitated the creation of some new moral identities and equally destroyed some old ones. This analysis of the new situations is intended to determine the extent to which adolescents' moral behaviour have been shaped by the incursion of social media networks. The situational approach also enabled us to examine theories of moral development by prominent scholars such as Kohlberg in relation to the current ICT developments.

The situational approach requires the solicitation of data from primary sources, hence this study relied on face to face interviews with 20 adolescent pupils, 10 teachers and 5 parents; focus group discussions (FDGs) with 20 Graduate Diploma in Education and Bachelor of Education students at the University of Zimbabwe. It also relied on analysis of messages posted on cell phones, various social media networks and reports in newspapers such as *The Herald*, *H-Metro* and *MyZimbabwe*. The use of these methods was largely influenced by the creative milieu, that is, Harare, the capital and primate city of Zimbabwe, where most adolescents are assumed to have a direct or indirect access to the social media networks. This assumption is substantiated by the Marketers Association of Zimbabwe Report (2012) which noted that the Internet craze has hit Zimbabwe to the effect that almost everyone in urban setting has Internet access at home, work place, and school or on mobile phones.

## **Findings**

### **Cyber euphorism and the metamorphosis of moral behaviours**

Data collected from the aforementioned sources revealed that social media platforms have become a mainstream source of news, information and social interaction, bringing with it new challenges and opportunities for adolescent pupils. Participants in this study unanimously agreed that social media networking and video sharing sites have become a social status marker among adolescents. Of the interviewed pupils, 85% concurred that they use social media not only to please their peers but also to 'feel modern and cool'. Teachers and parents interviewed described today's adolescent pupils as "*Tweeting and Facebook mad generation.*" In other words, social media has become a recipe of life for most adolescent pupils in urban areas. These

remarks are in tandem with Kohlberg's observation that adolescents connect for interpersonal concordance. This explains why adolescent pupil euphorically and emotionally bond with technological tools. While the use of Internet and its related social platforms have opened endless access to useful educational material and information, its abuse presents a serious setback to the moral development of pupils (Kunatch, 2012).

Participants in this study were in consensus that cyber bullying is the most serious moral ill associated with social media networks. Cyber bullying is any type of aggressive behaviour that takes place using various digital forums and technologies with the intention to inflict hurt (UNICEF Report Number 10, 2012:33). It includes: sending mean/hurtful/threatening messages to a person's email account/social networking sites/web pages or cell phone; spreading rumours online or through texts; stealing a person's information by breaking into his/her account, usually, for malicious purposes; pretending to be someone online to hurt another person; taking unflattering pictures of a person and spreading them through cell phones or the internet; sexting/circulating sexually suggestive pictures or messages to another person, cyber stalking, etc.

Data gathered from FDGs and interviews revealed that sexting and sex violence are the most common moral epidemics among adolescents who utilise social media networks. In this regard, 90% of the participants in the FGDs described adolescent they deal with in their schools as “sex crazy pupils” who exchange sex suggestive words and even nude pictures through cell phones and other social media platforms. Various newspaper reports support this observation. *MyZimbabwe*, November 22, 2012, carried a report of a leaked sex tape of two adolescent pupils at Lighthouse College in Chitungwiza (<http://www.zimbabwelatestnews.com>). Responding to accusation of pornographic videos and images circulating at Oriel Girls' High School during the 2012 Annual General Meeting, the headmistress said;

*after report of students sending pornographic material at the school using cell phones, we have agreed, as a school, to take the cell phones from any student found using one at the*

*premises...*

(<http://www.diigo.com>; *H-Metro*, 2012, Wednesday June 13).

Cases of sex violence (being forced or cajoled to perform sexual acts without consent) linked to social media networks frequently form newspaper headlines. *My Zimbabwe*, February 21, 2013, carried a report of a man from Collen Brown in Gwanda who seduced and impregnates four of the grade seven pupils he routinely and separately showed some pornographic videos on his cell phone (<http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/zim-gospel>). Similarly, *The Herald* of March 4, 2013 reported the case of a paedophile, aged 45, who was taken to court for exchanging nude photos with a 12 year old primary school girl. The 'sugar dad' is alleged to have bought the minor girl a Nokia Asher for easy communication through WhatsApp. *The Herald* of November 6, 2012, carried the story of an 11 year old boy who was convicted of sodomising a 9 year old schoolmate at Waddilove Primary School. *The Sunday Mail* of November 25, 2012, reported the case of an 18 year old Form 4 pupil at Chibi High School who was sentenced to 3years in prison for being found guilty of sodomising a 12 year old Form 1 pupil at the same school. The same paper also carried the story of a 19 year old head boy of a school in Murehwa who was arrested for sodomising 10 boys he shared a dormitory with. *MyZimbabwe* (2013, April 25) carried a story of a 14 year old Harare girl who forced a 5 year old girl to have lesbian sex with her as is usually done in lesbian movies (<http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/4990>).

The perpetrators claimed to have learnt these behaviours from social media networks and movies. To this end, *MyZimbabwe* (2013, April 3) carried a headline "Hot sex videos of all races, styles and types selling like hot cakes in Harare" (<http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news>). According to this online publication some of the pornographic homosexual and heterosexual DVDs carry names like 'Asian Delight', 'Jamaican Delight', and 'Exotic Ecstasy'. These are downloaded from specific websites and recorded. According to the same source a group of pupils from a college in the city centre revealed that they buy these CDs, two per United States dollar, and watch them on their laptops. Information gathered through interviews and FDGs confirmed that

adolescent pupils now think that profound knowledge and expertise in sex issues is an achievement and is materially beneficial. The idea of pupils denigrating each other for being virgins was widely expressed in the FDGs and interviews with the teachers. According to 70% of the interviewed teachers adolescents now regard virginity as a sign of 'backwardness' and of 'not being real'. One parent confessed that she was forced to transfer her Form 2 daughter from a girls' high school for being ridiculed and nicknamed 'sister' by her peers because she was still a virgin and without a boyfriend.

Sexting of suggestive messages commonly referred to as 'dirty messages', videos and nude pictures have also become rampant among pupils who use social media networks and cell phones (Nyakunengwa, 2013). Of the interviewed pupils, sixteen (80%) confessed having sent some semi-nude pictures to their boyfriends or girlfriends. Interviewed parents, teachers and FDGs confirmed that self exposure or sexting of nude pictures is rampant among pupils. Some teachers said “every time we confiscate cell phones from pupils and scroll them, we are shocked by the nude pictures and sex messages they contain.” *MyZimbabwe* (2013, March 16) had a headline “Esigodini school girl (15) kills self after mum took her cell phone” (<http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news/4908>). All participants also highlighted the commonality of Mai Gunguwo's explicit sex sermons on pupils' cell phones. An ICT teacher remarked that:

*Pupils abuse graphic designing software, Photoshop, by uploading fake images of themselves, peers, teachers or eminent members of society in nudity or even in compromising position.*

Following this, we categorically argue that social media has pushed sexual issues to the public arena. It has also promoted the exhibition of tabooed sexual behaviours such as sexual licentiousness and short term casual relationships as adolescents imitate and try to connect with what happens among their counterparts in the West. The idea of pupils engaging in what they call 'e-romance' was widely expressed in the FDGs. Lamenting the declining moral index and sexual libertinism of Zimbabwean youths, Igo (2009, p. 127) cites the case of a university

student who confessed that when approached, “I simply ask, is it sex you want or a relationship? We need to know the ground rules before we start.” Antonio's (2013) newspaper article with the headline 'too much sex in learning institutions worrisome' further demonstrates the magnitude of moral decay among adolescents. This sexual licentiousness, explains data released by the UNICEF Report Number 10 (2012, p. 22) that some 2, 2 million adolescents (10-19 years) are living with Human Immune Virus (HIV) globally and of these 1, 8 million are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Information gathered through interviews and FDGs further revealed that Hollyscoop.com and tabooola.com are some social media platforms that expose adolescent pupils to sexy life styles of American and European based celebrities. The platforms present these celebrities scantily dressed in lingerie. During the FDGs, participants emphasised that because adolescents are eager copy cats of these celebrities (who they regard as raw models) they often go out of their way to purchase similar undergarments and show them off by dropping their shorts or trousers. They also put on tight fitting and unimaginably skimpy constrictive dresses as they imitate their role models. In the African context, displaying one's undergarments or any form of suggestive dressing is regarded as uncouth. Little known to these adolescents is the fact that celebrities dress in that manner to show off their 'killer curves' or 'famous rears' as a gimmick to market their brands or products such as 'Shakira's song, 'My Hips Don't Lie'. However, in real life they look much different than they do on social media platforms. The former Minister of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (MoESAC) in the GNU, David Coltart, while addressing a Third Ministers' Youth World Forum at Busan in Korea, aptly stated that “Youths are often provided with very poor examples of sexual morality”, (<http://www.newsday.co.zw>, 2013, 15 July).

Marizani (2012) observes that as children graduate from adolescence to young adults, they encounter dramatic physical and emotional lifestyle changes which are linked to alcohol and drugs abuse. Being an adolescent is, therefore, a key risk factor for alcohol and drug abuse. According to the UNICEF Report Number 10 (2012, p. 21) many

people had their first experiences with tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs during adolescence partly due to the need to explore boundaries as they begin to develop their individuality. The same report avers that addiction to drugs among adolescents is due to their susceptibility to peer-pressure and the desire to fit into a specific social group. Such risky behaviours are detrimental not only to their moral development but also to their healthy and well being.

These observations were confirmed in FDGs and interviews with teachers, parents and adolescent pupils. Two female pupils said:

*We know that pachivanhu pedu (in our culture) women and especially girls are not supposed to drink or smoke, but you know, at times*

*you need some inducements to get chivindi (courage) to do certain things, or just to feel cool or high. So we splif (slang for smoke) and take some stuff and lagers (slang for drugs and clear beer).*

These sentiments were supported by a report in *MyZimbabwe* (2013, April 30) that a group of drunk and rowdy teenagers aged between 14 and 18, coming from the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF), caused chaos in the city of Bulawayo by shouting obscenities, embraced, urinated on the pavements and disturbed the traffic flow (<http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news/5141>). The phenomenon of sex orgies (a situation where people have sex freely at the party, whether they know each other or not) which, according to <http://www.radiovop.com/index.php/national-radio>, (2013, June 8) and <http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news>, (2013, June 13) respectively, is becoming rampant among adolescents was attributed to social media and drug abuse by a youth who was interviewed by Bridget M a n a n a v i r e of the *D a i l y N e w s* (<http://www.dailynews.co.zw/article/feature/65>, 2013, 10July).

Interviewed teachers and parents agreed that gangsterism and aggressive behaviours indicate moral indigence associated with social media. Given that adolescents tend to repeat and re-enact what they see in the social media, these behaviours are fuelling physical bullying in

schools. Tragic episodes of bullying at schools, such as, Prince Edward High School (*The Sunday Mail*, 2012, November 25) were attributed to social media by the interviewees.

Social media is further criticised for the opportunity it creates for deviant groups, such as child abusers, to circulate information on targeted victims and the extent to which it offers a platform for hate groups to trade insults. Some interviewed girls confessed that they often receive some anonymous insults and love messages on their Facebook. According to McCullagh (2002, p. 110) social media perpetuates cybercrimes, such as stalking, because the perpetrator can adopt new names and titles online. Perpetrators can even use facilities such as re-mailers to make their communication untraceable. Relatedly, participants in the FDGs concurred that, *“to many adolescents the online world is quite different from the real world, as such they often behave and utter words they would not say offline.”* Sex-loaded words and gestures dominate online adolescents' conversations. This observation is supported by Koovakkai and Muhammed's (2010) argument that 'while online adolescents are whole new, worse like in a pretend world'.

Through social media pupils are exposed to heroes and heroines of notoriety, warped personalities, social renegades, sex maniacs, drug addicts and perpetrators of violence. Due to peer pressure, mob psychology and egocentricity pupils tend to imitate these negative raw models. Furthermore, the confusion and emotional stress associated with their condition of being adolescence blurs their ability to delineate reality from fiction. Immoral cyber interactions are detrimental to the health and wellbeing of victims.

### **Effects of cyber bullying**

Cyber bullying has grave consequences to the victims. It is strongly linked to mental health problems of teenagers; hence writing about the May World Mental Health Awareness Campaign, Nyakunengwa (2013) described bullying as a virtual cancer. A medical expert cited by Nyakunengwa (2013) argued that in an effort to avoid being found on the receiving end, victims of bullying act tough, wild and violent.

According to participants cyber bullying results in victims becoming withdrawn as they feel unwanted, guilty and contaminated. These feelings, as posited by Glaser and Frosh (1993) lead to depression, lowered self-esteem, phobias and suicide attempts.

In relation to this, Papas (2013) wrote about a 15 year old girl who committed suicide after being teased and harassed on various social media platforms for allegedly sleeping with members of the soccer team. Pfunde (2012) reported the case of a girl from one of the elite schools in Harare who was suffering from serious clinical depression and contemplating suicide because her raunchy images were being circulated in the city via smart phones. Similar stories were recounted by pupils who participated in this study.

The dehumanising and toxic effects of bullying explains why the Principal Director of Early Learning Services, Crispen Bowora, was quoted by Choga (2012) saying; “bullying is one of the very few cases where corporal punishment can be applied, and only to the boy child, to show the seriousness with which the government views this issue.” Choga (2012) further observes that through Circular 22 of 2005 Zimbabwe's MoESAC reiterates its intention to eradicate all forms of bullying. Furthermore, Circular 35 of 1999 stipulates that a child found guilty of bullying should either be excluded from school in the best interest of the child or of the school or be expelled from school depending on the intensity of the bullying. The child bully may not be allowed to attend any formal school in Zimbabwe.

While these policies are noble we doubt if the government is fully aware of the magnitude of cyber bullying which seem to have replaced physical bullying practices among adolescents. Due to the ministry's position on bullying, as pronounced in the various Circulars, adolescent pupils seem to be turning to cyber bullying which is insidious and, therefore, difficult to trace the victim in order to punish. The situation is exacerbated by the digital divide between parents and adolescent pupils. Moreover, as noted by Kohlberg, because these pupils are in the moral development stage of orientation to law and order, they often access the social media platform privately. Given these social media-propelled



moral lapses, bankruptcy and dangers one question that begs for answers is, what forces are responsible for these cyber-based moral ill? The following discussion attempts to answer this question.

## **Discussion**

### **Tracing the rot to the roots**

Social media has become the epicentre of adolescents' moral development. It has not only widened the socio-moral horizons of adolescents, but has blurred their social identity to the extent that their social maps now overlap the traditional moral landscapes. Impression management, experimentation, fantasies, egocentricity, collectivity (the idea of having something in common, real or imagined) and the desire to fit in the modern global village influence the moral contours of adolescents in no small measure. In this regard, Koovakkai and Muhammed (2010) posit that social media provides fertile ground for adolescents to experiment as they transform into adulthood.

Social media has limited physical interpersonal interactions between adolescents and parents or significant others who were traditionally responsible for their moral upbringing. Their fascination with social media means 'buying into' some invented and exotic moral orientations. Consequently, they end up imitating the Euro-centric moral behaviours that dominate the social media. The behaviours, thought to be the bedrock of personal liberty, freedom, enlightenment and modernity, are meant to advance Euro-centric opinions, attitudes, beliefs and moral fabric which are corrosive to the African etiquette values engrossed in the *unhu/ubuntu* moral philosophy. In relation to this, Koovakkai and Muhammed (2012) posit that social media cause identity confusion in that as a socialising platform it allows adolescents to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds thereby influencing them to adopt moral behaviours which might be taboo in their own communities.

The adolescents who, by nature, are inquisitive and good copy cats are often misled by the social media to think that if they are to function as informed and competent citizens then they need to know and imitate events happening in the so called 'first world'. These ideas are fostered

for the benefit of European and American multinational media houses which have become the most lucrative industrial sectors in the global economy. To this end, Nichols and McChesney (cited in McCullagh (2002, p. 1) contend that 16 of the world's largest corporations are in the communication sector and 13 of the 100 richest people in the world are media magnates. Thus, although we are not disciples of reductionism, we agree with a Marxist perspective that material selected in the social media is one that is compatible with the interests of the dominant class. Stuart Hall saliently captures this by saying;

Ideological power is the power to signify events in a particular way, and the power of the media is the power to represent the capitalist order in a way that makes it appear universal, natural and coterminous with reality itself (cited in McCullagh, 2002, p. 38-39).

Adolescents in Harare are generally influenced by Eurocentric cartesian forms of rationality which considers indigenous forms of moral behaviour, enshrined in *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy, irrational, archaic, barbaric, abhorrent, pagan, and therefore not in tandem with the 21<sup>st</sup> century modernity (Museka, et al., 2013). The social media is corroding the indigenous etiquette values under the guise of globalisation and modernity. Following this we agree with Bourdieu's observation (cited in Schirato & Webb, 2003, p. 5), that modernisation is nothing but "false universalism of the west which is no more than a nationalism which invokes the universal in order to impose itself." This 'false universalism' which is being dispersed to various parts of the world through social media has serious effects on adolescents. Given this backdrop, we contend that *unhu/ubuntu* moral education must be invigorated if the toxic effects of the social media are to be minimised.

### **Towards *unhu/ubuntu* informed cyber interactions**

The nucleus of the African axiological wheel is the concern for human existence and wellbeing. This concern is aptly captured in the African philosophy of *unhu/ubuntu*. This philosophy denotes a good human being, a well behaved and morally upright person, characterised by qualities such as responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, etc., (*The Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training*, 1999,

p. 62). In other words, it is a campus that direct human behaviour and a barometer that measures humaneness, hence the submission by Museka et al. (2013, p. 31) that a person grounded in *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy is disciplined and responsible that he/she chooses to remain 'true to self' irrespective of the prevailing socio-economic environment.

As noted by Rukuni (2007, p. 89) in this aeon where media seem to “control what people think and do” *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy provides what he termed the “emotional on/off button.” *Unhu/ubuntu* immersed curriculum, that leads to the envisaged *unhu/ubuntu* engrossed cyber interactions, can thus assist adolescent pupils to recognise that social media is being used as a bait by drivers of 'false universalism' in order for them to 'buy in' to their ideas. Social media usually uses exaggerated sex appeals in exerting external control over adolescents and those who are weakly initiated in *unhu/ubuntu* moral philosophy are easily swept away and duped into swallowing morally toxic behaviours.

## **Conclusion**

Adolescent pupils' enthrallment with social media is corrosive and antagonistic to their moral development. Tweeting, skyping, blogging, and instant messaging gives an outward picture of an educationally and economically prospering society, yet in reality these platforms are serving as seedbeds of moral bankruptcy. Evidence gathered revealed that adolescents' road to delinquency is heavily dotted with social media hence our submission that this 'plug-in cancer' devouring the virtuous wellbeing of young citizens need chemotherapy in the form of informed *unhu/ubuntu* moral education. In the absence of this morally responsive pedagogy the country is likely to reap a bumper harvest of learned moral renegades. We thus, concur with Makuvaza's (2010) contention that *unhu/ubuntu* should become a new badge of educatedness. The gist of this article is saliently captured in Martin Luther King's (Junior) submission that “intelligence is not enough; intelligence plus character are the goals of true education” (Chivhere, 2013).

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