



# MOYA CHRONICLES

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## CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET TO THE CHRISTIAN YOUTH

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Since the outbreak of the pandemic—more than ever before—internet-mediated technology now defines how people engage — for good or for ill. Many churches have maintained active church-life by leveraging on internet-mediated technology as alternative means of doing church. On a personal positive note, while the members of my local assembly in Liverpool, UK have not met physically since 22 March 2020, we have grown significantly in active membership and engagement at our weekly meetings. The online Christian community of over 3,000 young adults led by my wife and I continue to thrive. Likewise, the episodic podcasts we host (Not Alone Today Podcast and Qmólúàbí Podcast) continue to flourish. All of these are made possible by the power of technology and the internet.

To be clear, however, my adventure with technology has not always leaned to the beneficial side. In my teenage years when on-demand internet access was still novel in my home country (Nigeria), my teenage curiosity steered my engagement with the online world in the direction of the muddy “stolen waters” of pornography. Momentary curiosity became prolonged addiction before becoming a testimony. It is clear, therefore, that while technology and the internet are indeed tools for advancement and development, they continue to pose various challenges especially for the youth — Christian youth more so! In this reflection, I will highlight three of such challenges and propose a good stewardship of how we use internet-mediated technology in God-glorifying ways rather than letting it control our lives.

### 1. Deception

I think this is the biggest challenge that internet-mediated technology (especially social media) is posing. Many young people are so engrossed with their internet presence that their sense of value is now tied to what people think of them on social media. Many are so desperate for followership that they will go to any extent to get it. The internet sells us the lie that it will keep us connected whereas it is pushing us further away from those closest to us. We text, video chat and connect with our ‘followers’ on social media, yet our real-world relationships and connections continue to suffer. The truth is that building and sustaining valuable friendships will demand our time and energy. While internet-mediated platforms may enhance this, they should never be a replacement for such real connections. Another expression of deception among young people and their usage of internet-mediated technology is the lie that engaging with social media will drive boredom away. On the contrary, research has shown that more and more young people are feeling bored and depressed as a direct result of their social media engagement. As Christian youth, therefore, it is important to reclaim our awareness of the true source of our worth. We find our true value and eternal satisfaction only in Jesus and nowhere else. We are designed and configured to “live, move and have our being” in Him (Acts 17:28).

### 2. Competition

This challenge is a natural product of the challenge of deception. When we get on the rat race of seeking



followers because of the illusion of significance attached to having more followers, we find ourselves in unnecessary competition. We start seeing our lives through the lenses of the projected images of other people. In reality, Christians live for an audience of “1”: GOD. This principle refocuses our vision from what people will think and/or say to what our Maker thinks and/or says. The principle affirms the understanding that we are unique—one-of-a-kind—and we will be doing ourselves a disservice by comparing what we’ve got with what any other person has gotten.

Isn’t that what Paul kept saying? He said it to the Corinthians: **“...Their trouble is that they are only comparing themselves with each other and measuring themselves against their own little ideas. What stupidity!” (1 Corinthians 10:12 TLB)**. He said it to the Galatians: **“You can see that I am not trying to please you by sweet talk and flattery; no, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please men I could not be Christ’s servant.” (Galatians 1:10 TLB)**. He lived it, and so should we.

Yes, your friend’s picture on Facebook where she posed seductively with her mascara and Mary-K looking on-point got her hundreds of ‘likes’ and ‘loves’ with comments like “looking sexy” while your own unfiltered picture with your natural beauty attracted only a handful of likes (including your own) and scanty comments that portrayed you as someone older – when you apply the principle of an audience of 1, it changes how you see that! When the status update you wrote with the self-knowledge of its richness or depth gets no much attention as you envisaged, think of this principle. Forget the opinions of others but always remember that God’s opinions have eternal consequences. (If we could say God has opinions, that is.)

### 3. Distraction

To engage the internet – especially social media platforms – is to *spend* your time. The challenge is that there are more things begging for our attention than we can pay attention to. It is no wonder that at the height of the lockdown across the nations, industries that are into video stream services (including pornography and gaming services) witnessed a record-breaking surge in usage. We are bombarded with lots of unsolicited information and we are clueless about managing them well. Perhaps the wisdom in Proverbs 13:20 can help. In The Passion Translation, it says **“If you want to grow in wisdom, spend time with the wise. Walk with the wicked and you’ll eventually become just like them.”** The first thing to note here is that to *walk* with ‘the wise’ (KJV) is to *spend time* with ‘the wise’ (TPT). In other words, there is a time-factor implied in this verse. And so, by further implication, you become more and more like ‘who’ or ‘what’ you *spend time* with. So, the question that Proverbs 13:20 poses for us relative to how much information we are consuming each day is this: How much of that information can be categorised as ‘spending time with the wise’?

Simple check: look back at the last few days; how much of your time was spent on WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Emails, Zoom, Snapchat, YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Google, Phone calls, etc . . . oh, and the Bible? Of course, I am by no means saying that spending *a lot* of time on any of those platforms or channels of information is necessarily wrong. Not at all. However, if you were to file all the data you consumed into ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’ folders, which folder will be heavier? Will a pattern emerge?

All that to say this: we should be intentional about who we spend time with and what we spend time on online. The Easy-to-Read Version of Proverbs 13:20 says **“Be friends with those who are wise, and you will become wise. Choose fools to be your friends, and you will have trouble.”** By using the word ‘choose,’ emphasis is being laid on the fact that we actually do have a choice in this matter. By not being intentional about what takes our time in terms of the information we expose ourselves to, we are *choosing* to be foolish. It takes intentionality to spend time with the wise.

A final comment on this will be to *identify* ‘the wise’ with whom you need to be spending your time. Identify the authors, bloggers, podcasters, coaches, industry leaders, preachers and social media influencers whose resources you can’t afford to not engage with. Indeed, who you choose to follow or engage with on social media will shape the kind of information that will be thrown at you via your social media *feed* and *stories* every single day, and in turn, they will *feed* our destinies and have a tremendous influence on our life’s *stories*. Let’s be watchful. May God help us.



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