

6th NATIONAL ICT SUMMIT

Venue: NIPAM, Windhoek, Namibia

7th – 9th October 2019.

Theme: “Accelerating Digital Transformation”

Day 3, Plenary Speech 8:40 AM

Motivational Speaker: Dr. Stanley Shanapinda

Topic: The Harm of Digital Technologies to young people and their
Identity Deficit

Honourable Deputy Minister Nawatiseb, the Executive Director of MICT, Mr. Ua-Ndjarakana, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning!

Today’s discussions will focus on ‘The State of Technopreneurship in Namibia’ at 09:00; and ‘Digital Transformation and Youth Participation in the Process’ at 11:00. The discussions will be about:

- how we train ICT graduates to be entrepreneurs;
- how we give young people a seat at the table; and
- how we can create pathways for them to successfully launch their products.

Because these issues will receive great attention later in the day, I thought I may want to speak about a related issue that impacts young people.

Tomorrow, Thursday, the 10th of October, is World Mental Health Day 2019. World Mental Health Day is a day for global mental health education, awareness and advocacy against social stigma. It was first celebrated in 1992 at the initiative of the World Federation for Mental Health. The focus this year is on suicide prevention.

So, what does mental health and suicide have to do with digital transformation, you may ask. Digital transformation we said on Monday affects and changes how we live our life's in a fundamental manner. Social media has also brought about major individual and societal transformation in the way we communicate, share and consume information. Digital transformation is about the effect it creates – we dropped fixed telephone calls, phone booths, SMSs and voice calls and use Instant Messaging to communicate. **The effect** of social media's digital transformation is best illustrated by statistics about how young people use social media – that's the other effect – young people use more social media than the older generation than traditional communication services. New Era informed us yesterday that everything is going digital and they must adapt or die. So, the struggle is real – the digital transformation created by social media is real.

A company called 'We Are Social Ltd' is registered in England and compiled a report on this. The following are the 2019 results:

- We have 811,500 internet users;
- Over 750,900 of us access the internet on our mobile devices;
- 66% of our web traffic was over the mobile phone in 2018;
- 670,000 (26%) of us are active social media users;
 - o The number of active social media users increased with 50,000 (+8.1%) more users in 2019;
- 620,000 (24%) of us use social media on our mobile devices;
 - o The number of users on mobile devices increased with 50,000 (+8.8%) more users in 2019;
- Google.com is the most popular website where we spent 7 minutes and 42 seconds and browse 9.54 pages a day,
- followed by YouTube where we spent 8 minutes and 47 seconds a day;
- Facebook is the 4th most popular website, where we spent 9 mins and 43 seconds on average and read 4.03 pages a day;
- In 2018 Instagram was the 8th most popular, where we spent 5 minutes and 23 seconds, and browse 3.34 pages a day;

- In 2018 when we visited Google we search for the term 'Namibia' the most, followed by the term 'Facebook';
- In 2018, 620,000 of us used Facebook;
- In 2018, 92% of us accessed Facebook on our mobile devices;
- The average Facebook user:
 - o 'Likes' on average 1 Facebook page only;
 - o 'Liked' 9 posts a month;
 - o posts 4 comments a month; and
 - o shares 1 post a month;
 - o click on 6 Facebook adverts a month;
- Instagram says 230,000 people can be reached in Namibia via Instagram for advertising;
- Instagram adverts grow at a rate of 4.5% annually;
- Twitter says 46,000 people can be reached in Namibia via Twitter for advertising;
- Twitter adverts grow at a rate of 9.5% annually;
- We need more local content and services online that are relevant to the users. The score for this is only 29.06 out of a 100. So 'techno-preneurs' can come up with content ideas so that more people can connect to mobile services; and lastly,
- 98% of Instant Messaging traffic is for WhatsApp, according to MTC.

However, social media transformation also has its unintended consequences. So, we must discuss the risk posed by digital transformation as well, and guard against it as we adopt digitalisation.

So, let's talk about what these potential risks are for the Namibian youth. There is a 'secret sauce' to these social media applications, that just makes it so tasty resulting in its popular use and therefore its digital transformation.

The question is, what is this 'secret sauce' and how does this 'secret sauce' affect the mental health of the Namibian digital native? The short answer is we do not know, or at least I do not, yet. I was not able to find relevant psychology and neuroscience research in this area that is specifically focussed on Namibian young people. So, there is a lot of research we can do in this area. However, we can see how young people are doing internationally and see what we can learn from that, because there's tons of international research on the subject.

This 'secret sauce' is used in web applications to get us hooked to social media and that is linked to issues that are related to mental health. The 'secret sauce' is this: ***social media increases the release of dopamine in the brain.***

This activate rewarding centers in the brain. Dopamine is a chemical, which regulates feelings of ***pleasure, seek*** and ***desire*** in a person. Dopamine also makes you to ***want*** something - to desire it, to constantly and always look for something. In other words, ***dopamine causes seeking behaviour.*** Dopamine brings the curiosity out in you - ***that*** is a prime instinct in all of us as humans – it is how we learn, look for information and to survive. So, if you want your students to pay attention you must increase the level of dopamine released in their brain to make them want to learn.

This is the reason why you are always looking through people's profiles on Facebook and Instagram and you keep scrolling. You are aroused to just keep browsing and scrolling, and it may be worse if you have unlimited Internet and if its cheap. Software developers at Facebook know this and so the algorithms are designed to make sure your brain releases dopamine so that you keep scrolling through your Facebook feed. Before you know it you have been on there for hours. They develop their algorithms to keep us clicking, using click bait. The likes are programmed to appear at specific times to deliberately reward your brain, so you can stare at your screen most of the time and see adverts so they can make money – this is called surveillance capitalism.

The excessive or frequent use of mobile phones and the hours of connection to social media are risk factors associated with addictive behaviour. In other words, there more you use it the more likely you are to get addicted. It does not however mean that because you use it too much that you are addicted. Your psychologist will tell you if you are addicted. So, please if you are worried about how much time you or someone you know spent on social media, let them speak to someone that can help. There is a risk that your frequent use of social media can lead to social media addiction and in turn can lead to depression, despair, anxiety which may then lead to 'suicide ideation'. Suicide ideation is when you are thinking about committing suicide. This is especially the case when the person experiences cyber bullying or cyber victimisation.

There is also another consequence. The use of social media can also lead to what Professor Joseph Camilleri calls the 'identity deficit'. This happens when the young person is more tightly linked to the digital representation of themselves, that is shaped in part by others. The individual has no agency and

gives in to social media pressure to be accepted. The person is counting social media likes and follows and is upset when unfollowed and projects a social media for approval by followers. They do not have strong sense of self, they do not know who they are and are vulnerable to the opinions of others. Your self-esteem, self-worth drops because you are constantly being rated and ranked by your peers that you want to impress. These feelings may then lead to 'suicide ideation'.

If you, or anyone you know need help, please:

- do call the Ministry of Health and Social Services at 061 203 2602;
- call Lifeline/Childline Namibia (Toll-free for youth) at 116; or
- if you are an adult, SMS Lifeline/Childline Namibia at 081 140 0222.

And now to the aspiring entrepreneurs in the digital economy. Young Namibian 'techno-preneurs' will also develop their own digital apps, such as social media and gaming applications, for fellow digital natives to use, and to use regularly so that the application is commercially viable – in other words it must attract and retain eyeballs so that targeted advertising can be offered to them. In this way the young 'techno-preneur' will make money from the application that he or she created.

To minimise potential mental health risks associated with social media applications, we must ensure web apps are designed ethically and responsibly, to help with the responsible use of the application. I would like to call it 'ethical-by-design'. This is a web application that is designed to consider the effects of mental health at the design stages, with the aim of minimising mental health effects. My plea to you as upcoming 'techno-preneurs' is to consider the responsible development of technology, so as not to manipulate your fellow young people to become addicted to your products, but to encourage the responsible use of your technologies.

Think about how that product can rather uplift the mood and spirit of the individual then making them anxious and depressed. Social media digital transformation must be done responsibly and ethically, and not to manipulate people for likes, to promote and sell products and just to make money.

To those of us suffering from the 'identity deficit', I would like to say: perhaps its time to quit social media; or reduce the use of social media – a social media detox or a social media fast. You can also better regulate your use of social media, by setting limits. Do no use social media before bed because that can

increase anxiety and lead to poor sleep. Do not engage with trawls online. Discuss online comments about you with a trusted friend and share how it makes you feel. Unfollow trawlers and negative followers, the number of followers is not worth your mental health. Above it all, minimise your use, by being alert about the number of times you check your WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. Just ask yourself every time, is it really necessary that I look at it now, or can it wait.

It is not all bad news however, internet addiction is also seen as escape – to escape unpleasant thoughts and feelings, as well as to reduce anxiety, isolation and negative emotions. In other words, the content you are looking at is important. So, identify what content creates positive feelings in you and which ones make you feel down. Minimise the ones that make you feel down. There are also other benefits of social media, so focus on these benefits - connect with other people as a source of emotional support and reduce stress.

Above it all, control your use, become the master of your social media application and do not become the slave of social media!

I thank you.