

## **Communication on Social Media: ‘Amen’ and ‘Share’ as Feedback**

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### **Abstract**

Language has remained an age old instrument that reveals the mindset of humans over the years. The advent of the social media has aided in revealing more of this wishful thinking through phrases like “type amen”, to claim what we have not worked for or avoid things that are not in our power to control; and ‘share’ to avoid breaking the chain of blessings. Quite different communicative strategies are used to express such demands on social media. We collected fifty of such messages and examined communicative strategies that senders use to have their receivers either to say amen, share or carry out other acts as requested and equally the feedback strategies in twenty of them. These messages were classified according to different categories- Prophetic promises for breakthrough trick, Humility trick, Range trick, Type and claim tricks, Direct and indirect Intimidation tricks, Monitoring trick, Supplication and picture tricks. The analysis reveals that feedback in social media is very important as novel strategies are developed. This paper therefore holds that communicators create diverse options to coax receivers to type ‘amen’, ‘share’ or carry out orders even when they know that what they said will not happen. This paper uses Chaos theory to reveal the disorder that reigns in social media communication.

**Kew Words:** *Communication, Amen, Share, Social media, Feedback*

### **I. Introduction**

Communication has never experienced an eruption in any period in history than what is happening today in the face of technological support. This statement is strengthened by Chamber (2013:1) in her declaration that social network sites constitute now a well-established mode of communication. Yet they only emerged in the first decade of this century. I cannot dispute the claim by ibid (2013:1) that “digital communication technologies are contributing to new ideas and experiences of intimacy, friendship and identity through new forms of social interaction and new techniques of public display, particularly on social network sites”. Even in the midst of this overflow, communication remains a chain whereby the speaker transmits a message to the receiver through a channel and receives feedback. This paper explores the different communication strategies people have adopted on the net through Facebook and WhatsApp, the social media sites adopted for this paper, to ensure that the

messages they send do not only have feedback, but the desired feedback. It therefore examines the different communicative options used to enslave or cajole users on the social media.

This paper aims to show that science has improved communication tremendously, revealing different communicative strategies that individuals employ for varied objectives. Impostors have used the social media to impose themselves on the social space where they have created a world of wishful thinking that is dangerous to national development in any nation. If people believe in typing amen to claim things they wish to have, they will only live in a make-believe world that offers nothing concrete; and if they believe in sharing for the continuation of the blessings attached to it, they will just end up floating on an empty space. This paper therefore examines the hypnotic strategies that people use to communicate their ideas and the monitoring strategies put in place to insure that their instructions are carried out by the receivers of the message. It further aims to find out whether apart from the myriad communication strategies deployed to receive feedback by senders of messages, there is any change in the communication chain in social media communication.

## **II. Background and Biblical view**

This section examines the background study of the terms ‘amen’ and ‘social media’, two concepts that are so important in this paper. According to The Restored Church of God website, historical records do indicate that the ancient Egyptians had, among their many gods, a god called Amen (the presumed personification of air or breath, represented by a ram or goose). However, no evidence can be found, linking the word amen (Hebrew: “truth”, “so be it”) to this, or any other pagan god.

The word makes its first appearance in the Bible under the most solemn circumstances in which a husband accused his wife of adultery. The woman, who was not caught in this act, protested her innocence. The matter was settled by God under the test of bitter water (Numbers 5:12-31). The woman was taken to the priest, and the priest put her under oath. She submitted to a ceremony in which she drank some water containing dust from the tabernacle floor. If she had committed adultery, she would be cursed with a wasting disease, but if she did not get sick, then she was proved innocent and her husband would be proved wrong. During the ceremony, when the priest pronounced the curse, the woman was required by God to say, "Amen" (Numbers 5:22 NIV). That is the first occurrence of the word in scripture.

In Revelation 3:14, Christ is referred to as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” It is used here in direct relation to the terms true and faithful, and emphasizes Christ and His message, the embodiment of TRUTH (John 14:6; 17:17). These verses conclusively show the word’s scriptural meaning. The use of ‘amen’ in this paper takes the biblical meaning of “so be it or let it be”.

### III. Social Media

Since people are social beings, relying upon one's abilities to interact with and influence others in order to survive, social media becomes a familiar word that everyone feels they should know. The word media in a traditional sense, according to Safko and Brake (2009:3) includes things such as newspapers, magazines, and television. The media also brings up impressions of how the news is delivered via print, audio, video, and photographs (Safko and Brake (2009). The media has always been particularly good at gathering people to read, watch, or listen to something of interest. This can be sports, culture, fashion, or international politics and even personal events. Communication on the media is a breakaway from the type that took place in the past where:

*neighbours would meet on the corner and coworkers would meet at the water cooler to talk about and share what they read in the morning paper, heard on the evening news, or learned from a friend of a friend at a party. Sometimes the conversation assumed life-and-death proportions, and sometimes it was simply about a sale at a local store. But whatever it was, people listened and often responded (Safko and Brake 2009:4).*

This simply shows that whether communication is on the media or physical interaction between people, there is always feedback that is received dissimilarly. Science has allowed everyone to participate in creating and delivering information to family, friends, and colleagues on a larger platform. This means that you are involved in a conversation with or without your consent. Of the three rules of social media for business highlighted by Safko and Brake (2009:5), I have retained the first two, which are relevant for this paper-

1. Social media is all about enabling conversations.
2. You cannot control conversations, but you can influence them.

In a bid to reinforce the definition of media, Turow (2014:3) opines that "Media are platforms or vehicles that industries have developed for the purpose of creating and sending messages". This entails a communication platform meant to enforce business transactions.

Social media according to Safko and Brake (2009:6) "refers to activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media". The conversational media considered for this paper are Facebook and Whatsapp.

In another related definition, Dewing (2012:1) holds that "the term 'social media' refers to the wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities. These include Blogs, Wikis, Social bookmarking, Social network sites (facebook and LinkedIn), Status-update service and Media-sharing sites (YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram).

The above social media sites show that there has been an evolution in the social media. Dewing (2012:2) holds that the first social network site, Six Degrees.com, appeared in 1997. A large number of sites were launched from 2002. Some of these sites have a huge number of users worldwide. For example, according to 2016 report by Reportgarden, a website that keeps track of social media usage, 1 billion people use WhatsApp, 42 billion messages are sent on this site daily. According to March 2017 statistics for facebook from Facebook newsroom website, there are 1.28 billion daily active users on average. This facebook was founded in 2004 and WhatsApp 2009. These statistics show that the two sites chosen for this study are heavily used sites. Any form of communication through these sites goes widely and can change the way people live. This can be either positively or negatively depending on what message is carried on the social media to the receivers.

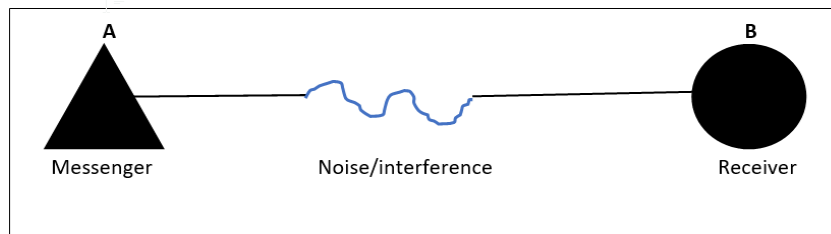
#### IV. Related Literature

##### IV.i Communication

One of the hallmarks of successful communication is associated with the notion of being appropriate, that is, providing the right kind of communication to match the right kind of audience (Ellis 2002:13). Communication implies mutuality, a reciprocation of sending and receiving. For communication to be effective, there are a number of things the speaker has to take into consideration before beginning the communication act. The communicator has to know what his audience is like, that is, the expectation of the audience. Ellis (2002:14) says sometimes we know who our audience is but in other situations we cannot be so certain. When we are invited to give a talk, it will be difficult for us to seek each and every member of the audience to ascertain precisely what are their attitudes, interests and likely reactions to our jokes and stories. As Ellis (ibid) puts it, “audience attitudes towards our communication can range from the highly positive to the very negative”.

Communication refers generally to the process by which information - sometimes simple stimuli - is received by an organism or organisms. At its most basic level, communication involves the sending and receiving of information (Findlay 1998:33). The conduit Model assumes that at times there will be obstacles (noise or interference) that impede the transmission of the message as seen in figure 1 below.

**Figure i:** The Conduit Model of Communication



The kind of communication this paper is interested in is the written type, which can easily be manipulated on the social media when it moves from one person to another.

#### **IV.ii Communication on the Media**

Communication in whatever form takes the same process, that is, from the sender to the receiver through a number of processes. When you speak or write, you send a message and the target receives it, processes it through his or her frame of reference, and forms perceptions. That frame of reference is formed by many factors: Attitude, Beliefs, Culture, Education, Emotions, Experience and Gender. Each frame of reference is different. Each produces different perceptions, which generate different impressions and reactions (Arredondo 2007:3). Communication, according to Arredondo (2007), has to take into consideration the following three suggestions about understanding the state of mind - timing your message, starting from the other's perspective and being sensitive to personal differences.

##### **a. Timing your message**

Timing is everything. Emotions affect how we perceive things. If you're going to ask for something or bring up a sensitive subject, don't do it when the person is in a bad mood. Wait until the mood improves; he or she will be more receptive

##### **b. Starting from the other's perspective**

Managers and employees typically have different perspectives—another factor that affects perceptions. Employees may form inaccurate perceptions simply because they don't have the bigger picture the way you do.

##### **c. Being sensitive to personal differences**

People differ by age, gender, ethnicity, culture, politics, religious beliefs, language, lifestyle, and so on. Be sensitive to how differences could affect perceptions of you and your message. Be attentive to your words, tone, gestures, and mannerisms.

Social media communication does not take into consideration the above three aspects because the sender of the message hardly knows the entire audience since the receivers are not limited to those in one's list of friends. Messages most of the time hit people unexpectedly and therefore do not usually return with the desired feedback.

#### **V. Theoretical consideration**

Chaos Theory is a set of theories and methods developed in different disciplines to understand and research complex, dynamic systems and non-linear development of these systems. Being open and able to self-organize are the features of the theory. Chaos, with reference to chaos theory, refers to an apparent lack of order in a system that nevertheless obeys particular laws or rules (Zhao 2010: 88). Graddol (2000:21) states that one of the central insights of the Chaos Theory is that complex reactions can result from the interaction of

simple forces. For example, the forces which act on a table tennis ball and which determine the direction of movement are relatively simple and can be modelled. But when a number of balls are put together, so that they bounce off each other, the result is sufficiently unpredictable as to form the bases for choosing the numbers in the British national lottery. Chaos theory also explains why very small influences can sometimes give rise to large effects.

Chaos theory will work in social media communication perfectly in the sense that, in a normal communication model, the direction of movement and a possible feedback are quite predictable as the message moves from the speaker through the various recognizable stages to the receiver and back to the speaker and all that within a context. Nevertheless, in the case of social media communication, the sender or speaker most of the time is unknown, the receiver is not known and feedback is not predicted. At the same time, a little communicative event may result in an outburst of uncontrollable reactions. This is when a communicative act goes viral on the net. The limits of such communication cannot be determined as the feedbacks cannot be determined as well. In this type of communication, there are several senders, several receivers and several feedbacks that may or may not meet the expectations of the initiator of the message. The only step in the chain that appears a little stable is the chain different people use to send the message across to one another. This is the type of chaos experienced on the social media today.

## **VI. Methodology**

Data for this study was collected over a period of 28 months, from February 2015 to June 2017. Fifty messages were collected and twenty used in the paper based on the different feedback strategies adopted for this paper. Data was collected from facebook and WhatsApp. Every message that ended with 'type amen' and 'share' was copied to a word page for subsequent analysis. Usually, the 'type amen and share' comes after a long narrative of something that happened to somebody and you don't want it to happen to you. I left out all the narratives and concentrated on the portions that are of concern to this paper. I equally engaged other people to forward such messages to my facebook and whatsapp addresses. These messages were analysed based on strategies used by the senders to elicit response. The strategies used here include, persuasion and pictures, threats, monitoring, prophecies, among others. However, the different appellations of the strategies used by the senders of the messages are my conception based on what such a strategy demands the receiver to do.

Of more than a hundred messages collected, only a sample was used to illustrate the kind of communication that takes place on the social media today. The analysis follows immediately after every data presented on the various sections.

## **VII. Data presentation and discussion**

The data is presented according to the various grouping following the messages carried through the different communicative acts. Given that the aim of the

sender(s) is to trick the first receiver to type 'amen' and forward the message to others through electronic communication so that the chain continues, I have termed them transmission tricks and have classified information under the different tricks developed. The following have been adopted for this work: Prophetic promises for breakthrough trick, Humility trick, Range trick, Type and claim tricks, Direct and indirect Intimidation tricks, Monitoring trick, Supplication and picture tricks. It should, however, be noted that some of these transmission tricks actually interweave, thus, making the headings not actually independent from the others. In the analysis, I will at some points go back to some other headings while discussing others.

### **VII.i Prophetic promises for breakthrough trick**

Prophetic promises for breakthrough tricks are such communications in which the sender acts like a prophet, making declarations purported to concern you and making you believe that typing amen and sending the message to other persons in your contact is a solution. Some of these messages include:

- i. *Your house and bank account shall be full of money this week! Type Amen and share to claim yours*
- ii. *Please send this prayer to a minimum of 20 people. Something good will happen tomorrow by 10:30. Someone will call you by phone or talk to you about something you have been waiting for. This is not a joke*
- iii. *I pray for the hands that type amen now! That God will use someone close to u, someone u don't know to settle ur problems in the name of Jesus! TYPE AMEN.*
- iv. *God will destroy everyone that has caused you pain, setback and restore those years you have lost.... Please write 'Amen' and share this story*
- v. *As 2016 is winding up, any help you render will not turn against you. Type amen and share'*
- vi. *As you write Amen to this prayer, the Blood of Jesus shall cover you, your family; Marriage and loved ones, Amen. Write Amen to claim this prayer.*
- vii. *I see Celebration, I see you and your Brothers, sisters, husband, Wife, Children DANCING for JOY. And it will start WITH the Person that is about to type Amen*
- viii. *Any human rat on an evil assignment to your house, shall die today in the Jesus' name. Type Amen with faith. Don't allow devil to hinder you from claiming this prayer by ignoring to type Amen.*

With the proliferation of many new churches, especially in Africa where prediction is the other of the day, it is but normal to observe such on the social media. Only trick (i) and (ii) have been analysed in this section because since they are all prophecies, they follow the same pattern. Receivers of the message (i) are asked to type amen and have their house and bank accounts filled with money while (ii) is to send to a minimum of 20 people and receive favour. This brings to focus a church situation where worshippers say 'amen' to all what is said even when they know that it is not going to happen. Naturally, money does not come by prayer, but by work. By predicting the exact time an action is to take place if one sends a message to a minimum of 20 people, the sender forces receivers to continue with the sending process, so as to receive the reward that

comes with sending to a minimum of 20 people. This is what I have called wishful thinking because this builds up a social media congregation where everything can be got by simply typing amen to a prophetic statement from self-made prophets.

In certain cases, the senders of the messages foreground some words to make them stand out. This is usually done by capitalizing or highlighting as is the case with examples (iii) and (vii) where some words are capitalized. It should equally be noted that data presented here was copied and pasted here with all the contractions common to social media messages like “u” for *you* and ‘ur’ for *your* amongst others.

### **VII.ii Humility tricks**

I have termed these utterances humility tricks because they make one feel that failing to type ‘amen’ to a message received is lack of humility. The command to type ‘amen’ in this case generally follows some touching narrative. The following are examples of humility trick:

- a. *I pray if you can humble yourself to type ‘amen’*
- b. *If you can humble yourself and say "Amen" with faith, two things shall happen to you. If You Are That Person, Write A Powerful "Amen" To Claim This Prayer*
- c. *It takes nothing from you, let go of your pride and please type amen and forward this to all.*  
*(a), (b) and (c) have deployed different strategies to attack the pride of the receiver. (a) pleads, (b) and (c) challenge, though in different manners. One of the simplest ways to humble a person is to touch his ego. Make him/her feel that he/she is behaving in a particularly way because of pride. Since people will not want to be noted for pride, they will type ‘amen’ so that the sender can know that they are humble. It is actually a strategy to cause receivers of message type ‘amen’.*

### **VII.iii Range Trick**

In range trick, the sender of the message ask the receiver to be either the first or one of the persons in a particular range to type amen and send a message across or to just send the message to a particular number of people against a particular reward. The following sample sentences are illustrations of range trick:

- i. *The first 6000 hands that type ‘Amen’ that has been going through life pains, ceased glory, standing or sitting at the same level through peoples wickedness will receive the honor of God’s breakthrough now by the power invested in you*
- ii. *Stop what you are doing and send to 20 people. Do not break! Just do it with faith*
- iii. *Demain sera le plus beau jour de ta vie. Ne casse pas la chaine. Envoie à 14 amis !! (tomorrow shall be a great day in your life. Do not break the chain. Send to 14 friends!!)*

Of the three range tricks, example (ii) says all what some of these message senders have in their minds. They want you to stop all you are doing in the physical and fly with them to the spiritual, an unrealistic world where every imagination is considered a reality. Examples (ii) and (iii) asked the receiver to type amen and forward the message to 20 and 14 people respectively while (i) urges the receiver to be the first among the range of 6000 to type amen and forward. All this is done against a promised reward from someone the receiver has never seen or known. This makes the social media a jungle, defined by Safko and Brake (2009:21) as “nothing more than a defined area where things eat each other to survive”. If the original bearer of a message has nothing to gain, why would he/she coaxed people into typing ‘amen’ to a message they receive. I guess somebody is feeding on another here to survive. Since communication is meant to change attitudes as Forsyth (2008: 3) holds, senders of the various messages have a goal to change the attitude of their receivers.

#### **VII.iv Direct and Indirect intimidation Trick**

Here, the receiver is made to feel guilty if he/she refuses to type amen and share. In some of the messages, the receiver of the message is intimidated to think that he/she is not who he/she claims to be. By not typing amen and sharing the message to the next person, the receiver may receive the curse of the sender. Examples of such messages include:

- i. *Only bad people will not type amen and share this*
- ii. *Type amen and send to all your contacts if you want it to last forever, but if you ignore this message your blessings will be ignored*
- iii. *Seven years of bad luck if you scroll down without like and type Amen!*
- iv. *Jesus: see my child is going to type amen and send to 15 people right now.  
Satan: Okay, mine will ignore it. Prove Satan wrong as I have done*

Under direct and indirect intimidation trick, (i) calls the receiver a bad person if he/she refuses to type amen. This means that the sender does not want to know why the receiver has not typed ‘amen’ and shared the message. In example (iv), the sender is conscious of the religious culture of his/her environment. Since most people will not want to be associated to Satan, they now trick the receiver to prove that they are God’s children by typing amen and sharing.

#### **VII.v Monitoring Trick**

In monitoring tricks, the sender wants the message to be sent back to him/her also. This is certainly to be sure that the receiver actually received and forwarded as requested.

Example

- i. *I have decided to send this message only to my loved ones. Send this to all your loved ones and even me if I’m one. If 5 reply then you are really a loveable person.*

- ii. *If this is a rumour then ignore, but if it is true, then type amen and share it with the people you would like to celebrate with. If you like me, share with me first.*

It becomes difficult not to send back when the sender first declares his/her love for you. The 'if' part of the trick in the two examples, obliges the receiver to forward the message so as to see how loved he/she is. This paper considers this a trick because the receiver may share even with the sender not necessarily out of love, but to save face.

### VII.vi Image Trick

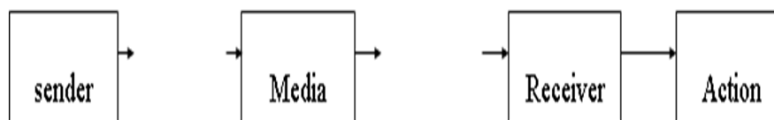
In image trick, a pathetic picture is forwarded to the receiver accompanied by a narrative which he/she is then expected to type amen and send to other if they don't want that to happen to them. In most cases, the images could be accident, sickness, death just to name a few. Receivers in such situation may type amen and share because they are afraid such a thing would happen to them. This can also fall under intimidation trick as the picture is meant to create fear and panic in the receiver.

From all the tricks presented in this paper, the underlined objective is to type amen and share a given message. The question this paper cannot answer is why so many different tricks for the same purpose- type amen and share. It is not yet clear who is gaining from type amen and share messages.

### VIII. Discussion and recommendation

Communication is considered complete if the sender receives the desired feedback from the receiver. In all the tricks identified in this paper used on the social media, type amen and share and send even to me and others, constitute feedback stimulation strategies.

**Figure ii:** Linear Communication

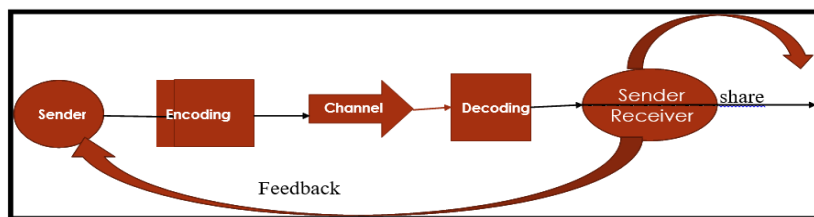


In a linear communication system like the one on the social media, the receiver passively receives the message and acts as directed or desired by the sender. Communication in this case can be considered as a way to control or manipulate the receiver. It is considered that messages pass through the medium chosen by the sender to reach the receiver without any distortion or change (Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi 2011:11). When the receiver acts on the message as demanded by the sender, chaos begins as the rest of the action after that is beyond their manipulation. With chaos theory in play, it is not certain that the message in a replicated process gets to the receiver without distortion. The original sender might simply have asked that the receiver shares the message. The receiver, who also acts as the next sender, might decide to ask for 'amen' and 'share'. The same message may get to different people with different tricks because the senders are many.

## IX. The Social Media chain of Communication

It is understood from social media communication that feedback is not the end of communication. The chain of communication does not end in a single communication process; it can be replicated and can even go viral. The receiver of the message doubles as the sender of the message. During the process of replication, some of the processes in the chain may change. Written messages from the sender to the first receiver(s) will maintain their form as it cannot be twisted (Bennie 2009), but from the receiver who is also a sender, one cannot be sure about the originality of the message.

Figure iii: Social Media communication Chain



The social media communication chain I have drawn in figure 3 shows that feedback is not the final product in communication. It also shows that unlike in a normal chain of communication where the sender and the receiver have distinct roles, in social media communication, the receiver also assumes some of the sender's functions. This is seen when the receiver also sends (shares) information and requests feedback. This process of receiving and sharing can lead into an uncontrollable dimension when a message becomes viral with almost all receivers becoming senders. The chaos theory becomes very evident here as a small speech act from a well-known source gets viral and can no longer be managed. Chaos is the order of the day in receive-share type of communication that is practiced on social media.

## X. The psychological function of 'amen' and 'share'

From the data presented in this paper, the following psychological functions of 'amen' and 'share' can be deduced:

- *'Amen' and 'share' give a false impression that a bad situation will automatically become good, even if the receiver types 'amen' and does nothing. This is a dangerous impression that can lead to depression if the gullible receiver counts down to the announced breakthrough and nothing happens.*
- *The sender is mistaken to think that a number of 'amens' received indicate the amount of love that the receiver(s) has for the sender. The receiver may send a message he/she has received back to the sender not as an expression of love, but as a face saving act.*

## XI. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the strategies that people use to communicate and to sustain communication on the social media. It further aimed at finding out

whether besides the myriad communication strategies deployed to receive feedback by senders of messages; there is any change on the communication chain in social media communication. It has been observed that communication on Social Media adopts varied strategies for feedback; it does not end with feedback as traditional communication holds. Social media communication provides feedback, but also begins a new chain, which is difficult to predict its end. This happens because the receiver in social media communication chain doubles as the sender/source as he/she is required not to break the chain of communication. ‘Amen’ is a hypnotic strategy that unfortunately sustains the receiver to live in a make-believe world of command and receive. ‘Share’ is seen as a monitoring device used by senders to ascertain that communication is not broken, thus developing a new communication chain from the traditional communication chain. This paper has therefore shown that the communication process no longer ends with a message from sender to receiver and feedback. In the new chain, the receiver who forwards the message received also assumes the function of the next sender and the process continues. Communication has therefore changed with technological innovations.

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