

A holistic framework for addressing 'safe' sexting challenges in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on analysis data arising from a study of sexting perspectives and experiences of college students in Kenya. The study reveals that young people harbour misconceptions about this form of sexual communication, and how to address its associated challenges and negative experiences. The authors use the empirical findings to suggest a framework that identifies seven constructs that critically analyse and describe how agents of socialization processes need to collaboratively work together in order to address the misconceptions, negative perceptions, and behaviors thereof. The proposed framework is conceptualized as a holistic approach with two interacting zones; information and knowledge, and actions, and sustainability. Further, the paper describes the extent to which suggested elements ought to work together to provide the youth with the right information, skills, and competencies required to address issues and challenges associated with sexting. In conclusion, the paper recommends strong guild responsibility and linkages of teachers, parents, and professional associations in the development of educational programmes, policies, and initiatives required to mold youth into responsible people regardless of the new communication technologies.

Keywords: *sexting, youth, framework, communication, socialization*

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Introduction

This article analyses and discusses the proposed framework for addressing 'safe' sexting challenges among the youth. The term 'safe sexting challenges' has been coined and conceptualized to imply lack of proper information, skills and knowledge, and joint incentives with regard to addressing issues related to sexting among adolescents and young people in Kenya. The proposed framework for addressing safe sexting challenges is postulated with insights from empirical findings obtained from a larger study that was conducted in 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya. For the purposes of this study, the term sexting was operationalised as creating and sending sexually explicit or implicit text messages, videos and photos through mobile phones (smartphones). The underlying question, from whose findings the proposed framework is postulated was: what strategies should be put in place to address the challenges related to sexting among the youth in Kenya? In addressing this research question, we sought participants views on how to tackle challenges they experienced while sexting.

Smartphones have provided the functionalities to create and exchange sexual content (sexting) with ease. Most scholars agree that mobile phone mediated sexting has become a trend among young people (Hasinoff, 2015; Eraker, 2010; Ringrose et al., 2012; Campbell & Lippmann, 2014; Walrave et al., 2014; Hasinoff et al., 2012; Poltash, 2013; Albury & Noonan, 2010; Pearce, 2013). In fact smartphones have changed and introduced new terrains in which sexting take place. Some of these terrains (contexts) are complex than what current research studies envisage. Similarly, mitigation frameworks required to address issues related to these complex sexting settings require detailed analysis and contextualization of the social environment in which young people live, grow and operate.

Consequently, we propose that initiatives and frameworks formulated to address challenges of sexting should adopt a holistic approach, rather than pursuing a legal solution only. A holistic approach that adequately analyses the contribution of the various socializing agents with reference to addressing the problems of sexting would be most appropriate. The proposed framework suggests a wide range of constructs that examine issues of sexting from a broader perspective. Before the elements of the proposed framework are examined and discussed, a brief review of literature with regard to past frameworks and initiatives developed to address issues related to sexting is important.

Previous Frameworks and Initiatives

As a point of departure, this study took into consideration the ongoing scientific, scholarly and media debates on development of frameworks and educational initiatives put forth to address problems associated with risky sexting and sexual activities. However, the study focuses on development of broader perspectives that critically analyses the social environment in which adolescents grow and live with the aim of understanding the

contribution of each element in making sexting and other online behaviours safe. The article acknowledges that sexting takes place in an environment of interacting socialisation agents and therefore solutions to address challenges thereof must be conceptualised in the same broad sense.

The initial initiatives and responses comprised legal frameworks that responded to youth sexting by prescribing punitive and harsh procedures for prosecution of youth guilty of sexting (Doring, 2014; Hasinoff, 2012; Schubert & Wurf, 2014). These frameworks specifically considered the legal ramifications and implications of youth sexting, and proposed application of child pornography laws to make this youth behaviour illegal. Though the legal procedures approach is still popular in most jurisdictions, a number of scholars have suggested the need to critically review and repeal the child pornography laws in order to address underage sexting, otherwise we might have adolescents suffering severe consequences for an activity they perceive 'harmless' in their dating and peer-social interactions (Eraker, 2010; Judge, 2012).

The debate on appropriate ways of how to deal with consensual sexting among consenting adolescents or adults is still ongoing (Ringrose, 2012; Hasinoff, 2012; Walker & Moak, 2010). Some scholars consider child pornography laws as a way of dealing with youth sexting way too punitive, others prefer the high penalty as the most appropriate way to prevent sexting (Eraker, 2010; Ringrose *et al.*, 2012; Hasinoff, 2012). Notably, there is a general observation among academicians and policymakers that the legal frameworks have not been effective in preventing onset and continuous sexting by young people (Doring, 2014; Poltash, 2013). In fact, the latest research shows that exchange of sexting content is escalating among adolescents and young adults despite the legal efforts put forth to eradicate the behaviour (Asatsa *et al.*, 2017). Most contemporary scholars recognise the need to shift the approach of addressing problems associated with sexting. They emphasise the importance of shifting from criminalizing sexting to devising education programmes and campaigns that teach youth about the negative consequences of risky sexual behaviours and online activities (Pearce, 2013).

In light of the need to shift focus from using harsh judicial system in favour of educative and regulatory frameworks aimed at corrective action, a number of scholars (Doring, 2014) have suggested alternative frameworks. These frameworks analyse sexting not only from the risky perspective which requires stern action (severe laws) to address but also the perceived opportunities standpoints. Wolak & Finkelhor (2011) suggested a comprehensive topology that broadened the definition and forms of sexting. They suggested two categories of sexting; aggravated and experimental forms of youth sexting. Aggregated sexting contains abusive and criminal behavioural aspects of sexting while experimental forms of sexting incorporate sexting that does not involve criminal intention. With reference to this framework, the concern of scientific scholars has been on the possibility of experimental sexting transforming into aggravated sexting (Albury & Lumby, 2010; Ringrose *et al.*, 2012; Hanisoff *et al.*, 2012; Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014).

Therefore, in a sense, the distinction between the aggravated and experimental sexting is somehow blurred.

Wolak & Finkelhor's topology suggests broad and inclusive forms of self-produced sexual content. This framework is useful in design of educational programmes and interventions aimed at addressing the negative consequences of sexting (Eraker, 2010; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011). This framework distinctly discredits frameworks that exclusively treat sexting as negative and dangerous. Given the tremendous effort to recognise sexting as an important part of youth sexual development, a section of scholars have suggested diverse frameworks that differ in their scope and breath in addressing opportunities and risks associated with sexting (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011; Harris *et al.*, 2010; Katherine & Twist, 2017; Campbell & Park, 2014)

Social emancipation framework which was first suggested by (Ling, 2004) and popularised by Campbell and Park (2014) is another better alternative framework for conceptualizing and theorizing about sexting outside the legal frameworks, specifically the child pornography laws. Emancipation framework considers sexting an important part of adolescent sexual development. As children transition to adults they need to develop useful social and mental skills that they use later in life (Vanden Abeele *et al.*, 2012). These skills relates to sex and sexuality, dating, interpersonal and group communication (Judge, 2012; Hasinoff, 2015). Notably, these frameworks transcend beyond criminalization of sexting and recognise positive opportunities associated with the behaviour (Hasinoff, 2012).

Though a recent phenomenon, sexting is complex and multifaceted. Consequently, frameworks that analyse positive opportunities and risks associated with this form of sexual communication need to understand and contextualize the behaviour within the broad social and cultural dynamics. For instance, it is imperative to analyse the cultural and technological values that stem from perception of 'emancipation' of girls in light of the deep rooted gender and power dynamics. This article agree with scholars who allude to frameworks that suggest that technology 'emancipate' girls in the sense that they become capable of expressing sex and sexuality, beauty and sexiness (Hasinoff, 2012; Wang, 2012). However, it is important that these scholars analyse how girls produce and express sexiness, beauty and sexual desires in a misogynist society. The authors of this article posit that sexting as a form of 'emancipation' does not in any way equate to power and agency, it only reinforces the masculine construction of female sexuality, which is dangerous because men can disempower, manipulate and control girls/women by making them victims of their own sexual expression. Men can use the supposedly 'emancipated' woman sexual content to abuse and deny women opportunities. Therefore there is need to focus on initiatives and frameworks that adopt a holistic approach.

Working with the premise that sexting is complex and multifaceted is crucial in developing frameworks that adopt an inclusive approach, where the different elements that are involved in formation of sexting behaviours are analysed with attempt to

contextualise the activity or provide solutions to the negative consequences. This explains why the framework proposed in this study suggests a wide range of constructs. These constructs aim at identifying the broad areas that need to be focused on so that the design and implementation of initiatives that address 'safe' sexting challenges assumes a holistic approach. When we adopt a framework that looks at sexting from a holistic perspective, then the response and the initiatives developed will address the issues with a broad response in mind. Most prior frameworks have not suggested broad ways of addressing issues of youth sexting. Some of the previous frameworks have framed ways of addressing sexting from the binary dichotomy of risks and benefits (Doring, 2014; Gasso, 2019).

A section of scientific scholars agree that in order to have a holistic approach that addresses issues of sexting from a broad perspective (Wicks, 2017; Harris 2017), we require "a comprehensive perspective on teen sexting behaviours and practices" that put the "issues into the broader context of adolescent experience and forces that help shape it" (Harris *et al.*, 2010, p. 69). In other words, frameworks and initiatives must appreciate that sexting is developed within the broader spectrum of adolescent socialisation, where multiple external agents and entities shape the behaviours of the youth or act collaboratively to produce the behavioural effects we interpret as sexting or problematic sexual behaviours (Benotsch *et al.*, 2013; Rice *et al.*, 2012). Scientific literature has mentioned peer influence, media and digital technologies (internet, mobile phones), schools, role models and more as the external agents that influence youth sexting (Walrave *et al.*, 2014; Lippman and Campbell, 2014).

Adopting a holistic approach will require in-depth analysis of internal and external factors that contribute to the development of adolescent behaviours and personalities, and how these attributes affect decision making, and formation of values and norms (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2017; Burchell *et al.*, 2013. Harris *et al.* (2010) consider psychosocial development, self-agency and self-esteem to be part of internal factors while social agents such as "social, institutional and cultural forces" are part of the external factors (p.70). Maxwell *et al.* (2008) suggested a restorative response to act as alternative to criminalization and prosecution of young people as perpetrators of child pornography. Restorative response suggests "joint stakeholder deliberation" that involve parents, schools, peers, society and judicial system as "fundamental to achieving restoration" that provides strategies that can be used to manage social harms and address issues associated with sexting (p.1). In a study by Wicks on joint perspectives about restorative justice, participants considered the restorative process as constructive way of addressing harmful incidents of sexting (Wicks, 2017, p. 66).

Methodology

As earlier pointed out, the proposed framework is postulated using empirical findings of a larger study that was conducted in Nairobi, Kenya, between March and July 2017. A qualitative approach guided the study since the researchers sought to provide in-depth

and elaborate analysis of activities, perceptions and experiences of sexting from a diverse group of college students who engaged in sexting using smartphones. Data was generated from 65 students aged 18-25 years, using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. Diverse characteristics that were taken into consideration included: gender, course, location of the college, religion, year of study, dating status, age, residence (living alone, living with students, living in hostels and residence etc.). To recruit the participants, we first started by purposively selecting five colleges in Nairobi from which to draw the sample. Then convenience sampling strategy that utilised both purposive and snowball designs was used to select students who engaged in sexting. Selecting students who participated in sexting activities was done in order to gain in-depth and richness of data and this justifies the use of purposive and snowball techniques. Progressively, purposive sampling was used to select the primary participants who in turn assisted in recruiting more additional participants. In order to achieve anonymity and nature of the study, symbols were used to identify both the participants and colleges these participants were drawn from.

To answer the research questions, the FGDs and interviews were conducted in the colleges when the students were free. In total, thirty in-depth interviews (11 males and 19 female) and seven FGDs (N=30) were conducted with the selected participants. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 125 minutes. The FGDs comprised five to seven members. We conducted two FGDs in two of the colleges ([DM] & [KP]). During interviews, both boys and girls expressed their personal sexting experiences and activities freely without feeling embarrassed. In the FGDs, some girls were not comfortable articulating issues on sexting which made boys dominate some of the sessions. Therefore, one FGD which comprised girls only was conducted. The FGDs lasted between 75 minutes and 107 minutes. Due to the nature of the study and to discourage the participants from feeling disempowered, before the beginning of interviews and FGDs, all pertinent details about the study were communicated. Consent was sought to participate in the study and permission was sought to record interview and FGDs conversations using an audio recorder. Interview and FGDs guides were developed to assist the researchers on the areas to elucidate responses during the conversations. Then the interviews and FGD audio data were transcribed verbatim using the Listen N Write transcription software. Then transcribed data was coded and thematically analysed by reading through the transcribed data. Thematic analysis allowed the researchers to unravel the patterns of experiences, perspectives and activities across the interview and FGD data. Triangulation of interview and FGDs data ensured the credibility of the findings.

In the next section, explanations on the way the proposed model was conceptualised are provided, with details of how the different elements of the social-environment need to make contributions geared towards changing youth perceptions about sexting and related sexual activities. Specifically, the framework conceptualises how the processes of socialisation can be used to shape perceptions and behaviours of young people towards

addressing the issues of safe sexting challenges. This is a holistic perspective that identifies seven elements of socialisation process that requires to be analysed in terms of their contribution towards addressing issues of sexting and misconceptions around the activity. Several scholars have suggested the need to conduct research on the larger social contexts of sexting (Hasinoff, 2012; Walker, Sancu & Temple-Smith, 2013).

Building Blocks of the Proposed 'Safe' Sexting Framework

The proposed framework comprises seven elements of the socialisation process that must work together to address misconceptions around (unsafe) sexting. Each element allows us to examine and describe its role, in respect to the entire social environment, in addressing negative sexting perceptions and behaviours. These are just constructs that allow us to conceptualise and discuss how the different elements of immediate socialisation agents need to operate in order to address problems associated with 'safe' sexting challenges. These elements are developed from the word **SEXTING**, and include: Societal accountability, Education and awareness, Exoneration of young people, Technology and industry, inertia and momentum shift, Nurturing positive behaviours and perceptions, and Guild Responsibility. Use of the word **SEXTING** which is considered problematic youth behaviour implies that solutions to the perceived problems can be found in the same social context in which the activity is practiced. In **Figure 1**, the proposed framework illustrates how processes of the socialisation environment should create activities that work together to address challenges (misconceptions, issues and illusions) associated with youth sexting. The framework is conceptualised as composing of two interacting zones; information and knowledge, and actions and sustainability in order to adequately address the problems of youth sexting.

Societal Accountability

Social accountability element represents the extent to which the society has a responsibility of bringing up responsible youth who have the right skills, information and knowledge to respect privacy of other people and engage in responsible online activities. Scientific research considers sexting to be a complex social issue which can be interpreted from multiple dimensions of social interactions (Smith & Ball, 2014). Sexting can be explored and discussed within the context of social organizations and systems. In other words, young people who perpetuate sexting are products of several years of social-psycho development within the complex social system. Young people are enmeshed in dense webs of people, institutions, information, influence and risk (Smith, & Ball, 2014). Society prescribes roles, norms and rules that influence and shape development of children and young people (Walrave *et al.*, 2014). The larger social context, which comprises the culture and subculture where young people grow and live, prescribes general belief systems, values and expectations.

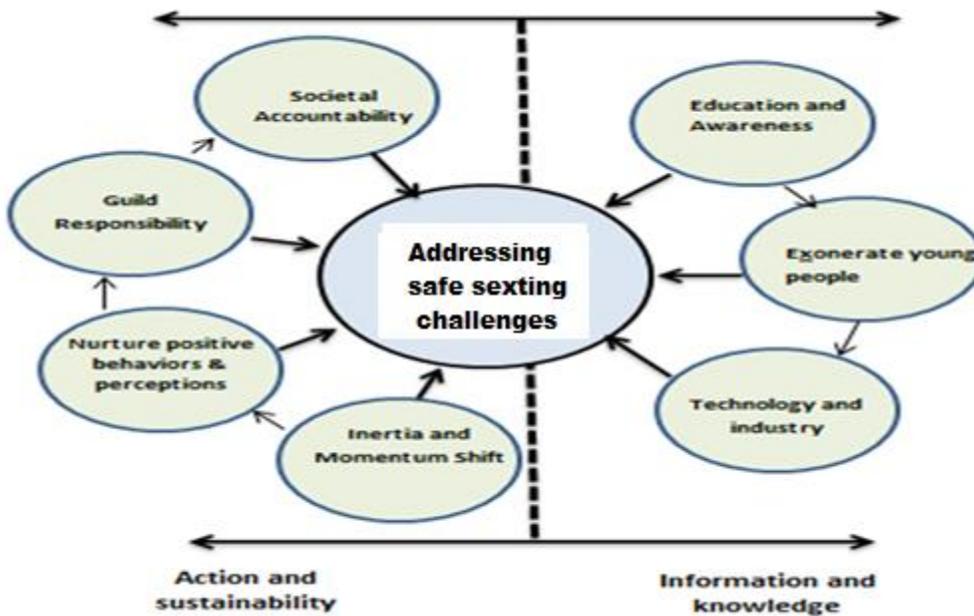


Figure 1: Framework for addressing safe sexting challenges

Smith & Ball (2014) further argue that the components of these subsystems incorporate the attitudes, ideologies and behaviour patterns that exert influence over the kind and nature of social interactions.

Participants in the present study maintained that the way young people engage in sexting is dependent on important factors of sexual socialisation. They stated that rules, standards and norms set by the society influences how young people interpret their actions with reference to sexting behaviours. Consequently, they mentioned the need to analyse and understand how cultural standards, social-economic factors, gender dynamics and sexual double standards, power imbalances between boys and girls, and sexting norms influence the way young people create and share explicit content. One boy said, “*mostly the woman, right now in the society, the man just walks scot-free but the woman i guess suffers from her self-esteem to the dignity as a woman they are all shattered so, the lady really suffers*” (M6INT). On the same issue of gendered sexting perceptions, one girl noted, *i don’t know why society does that, i think it because, the ladies said that you should know yourself, dignity comes first, normally in this society the man is the one who hunts for the lady and not vice versa, so you find it is like exposing yourself is like you are the one looking for men instead of men looking for you, it is the man and fellow women who stigmatize the lady* (F5INT). Participants’ gendered perceptions of sexting revealed how girls’ are socialised to show naked body instead of focusing on how to build strong personality and academic skills, “*i can say you know generally men look at the body of the girl, curves and everything, so they tend to show the curves, the girls send the seminude, i have never seen may be the nude, there are always seminude, so you see the curves , her*

assets, stuff like that" (MINT) A number of scientific studies have illuminated on gendered sexting behaviours (Ringrose *et al.*, 2012; Grimus, 2014; Lippman and Campbell, 2014; Cooper *et al.*, 2016). Concerning media's role in sexual socialization, a number of participants described how visual texts have reinforced sexting as part of youth sexual communicative and expressive culture, *"what i can say for the media the is somehow educative and it is it somehow spoiling us, during the day media can bring a program where they protest about drugs, pornography and other stuffs, then at night they bring dirty images bad movies and people watch"* (FG02). One girl argued that technological growth and proliferation of smartphones has rendered young people helpless with regard to creating and sending naked images, *"(laughs) so long as they have the phones they cannot stop from sending nudes to people, they love it, maybe we do away with phones"* (F2INT)

Society through its agents of socialisation has a responsibility to gradually and consistently challenge the prevailing social-cultural values that relates to issues of power structure, sexualisation of media, and unbalanced access to knowledge and information. For example, young people require information of how respect privacy and security of other people irrespective of their perceived position in the society. Perceptions of gender roles relates to access to knowledge and information, at individual, family and society levels (Nielsen, 2019).

Education and Awareness

The education and awareness block of the proposed framework represent the extent to which young people should be given skills, knowledge and information on the negative consequences of sexting and how to dispel the misconceptions and consequently promote healthy sexual development. Education programmes should be devised in a way that equip young people and other stakeholders with the right information and therefore help eradicate the misconceptions about sexting. Studies also predicts that the widely held misconceptions may encourage the youth to engage in sexting in an attempt to conform to perceived norms (Hasinoff, 2014; Eraker, 2010; Judge, 2012). For instance, subjective misconceptions that sexting is normal and common might make college students overestimate the level and nature of sexting activities of their peers, as noted in a number of instances. In one of the FGD, one girl put it, *"even nudes you know it likes if he your boyfriend you think it is no big deal you think it is no big deal because you have been with him so it is normal so you go to the bathroom, where are you, now going to the shower, give me a picture (laughs loudly)"*(FG05). In a different FGD, another female participant exclaimed, *"i think sex chatting is normal everywhere, it is not big deal, yeah it is not big deal"* (FG02)

Education campaigns and policies are also important in respect to how policy makers, teachers and students perceive dangers of sexting and opportunities. Most of the participants in this study felt that issues of sex and sexuality are not properly taught at school and home, *" ... but nowadays children as young as school going kids know about sex, parents need to change, sex should start from home..."* (M10INT). One girl put it this way: *" ...*

my parents have not discussed sexual matters with me, my parents we never shared something sexual with me, we rarely discuss sexual issues with them yeah we don't" (FG05)

Though acknowledging that sexting would be hard to stop, a section of participants of the present study felt that young people require guidance, education, moral support and effective way of keeping them busy and this way sexting would subside as one girl reckoned, *"...but youth needs to empowered to engage in other general activities, morality is very bad nowadays and therefore guidance and counseling should be used to help and educate those people"* (FG06). Awareness campaigns would have a great impact on sensitising young people about consequences of sexting as another girl noted: *"they should be told the consequences, how it can affect their life if those photos are found somewhere, i think they should be told"* (F9INT).

In previous studies the style and role of parenting has been reemphasised (Doring, 2014; Wallis, 2011; Norman, 2017). Family and parenting behaviours such as parent-child communication have been identified as primary contexts within which young people learn skills and acquire knowledge that they later use to develop interpersonal and romantic relationships, sexual behaviours and peer-social interactions (Martinez-Prather & Vandiver, 2014). Norman (2017) argues that "parenting behaviours and the parent-adolescent relationship may offer important insights into the process that lead to adolescent sexting (p. 19). A few female participants in the present study observed that though their parents did not delve deep into discussing explicit sexual matters, they guided on how to form responsible dating relationships. One such girl revealed that although her mother did not deeply address sexuality and sex issues at least she guided her on how to protect herself when having sex, *"...parents guide without discussing those detailed issues on sexuality, ...when you are having sex this and that, she won't go deep into that, she will just put it please take care of yourself know where you are the people you associate with yeah"* (F15INT). Another girl discussed how her mother way back from when she was in high school used to talk to her about sexual relationships, *"yeah, I'm so free with my mother i can tell her i have a boyfriend, i can even show his pictures may be, and when i was in high school when i was a teenager my mum used to talk to me about these sexual relationships, she was not afraid to tell me, yes"* (F8INT).

Education and awareness programmes should stress on how to teach young people to stop asking for naked images/videos and how to respond when requested to send such content. Curriculum should relate these sexting issues to everyday life of forming social-sexual (dating) relationships and use of social media. It is important that students are made aware of the relationship between the online and offline sexual behaviours, harassment and sexual activities, and how these relate sexting.

Interestingly, participants in the present study did not pay much attention to the connection between problematic sexual behaviours and sexting. Therefore, education programmes and awareness campaigns should stress on the long-term and short term impacts, like losing out on employment prospects. Besides, the initiatives should stress on

the psychological and physical consequences of sexting and related problematic behaviours like sexual activities, masturbation etc.

A number of researchers have concluded that “perceived social norms of peers [are] the most important predictors of adolescents’ intentions to engage in sexting” (Van Ouystel *et al*, 2017, p.5 ; Walrave *et al*, 2014; Walrave *et al*, 2015).. In the present study, participants noted that sometimes the perceived harms are peer managed but peers lack the relevant skills to provide necessary support. Therefore, peers should be provided with education necessary to raise awareness on how to deal with persons suffering harms, and learn to provide necessary support to colleagues who have suffered harm. Previous scholars have shown that when peers are involved in counseling programmes it is easier for them to influence the behaviours of their colleagues (Harris *et al.*, 2010; Walrave *et al.*, 2014; Phippen, 2012).

There should be increased awareness about the laws and acts that touch on sexting. Young people should be educated about the legal obligations, their rights and responsibilities, and the importance of laws on child pornography and inappropriate exposure (Eraker, 2010). Specifically, adolescents need to be taught on laws and statutes on cyber safety, pornography, cyber bullying, and computer misuse. By doing so, young people might realise the importance of digital responsibility, and possibly stop engaging in inappropriate behaviours including unauthorised distribution of sexting images or videos. As well it is important to empower participants on what to do when they are victims of unintended forwarding of sexting messages. Further, the education should focus on attainment of broader skills needed for positive use of the internet, and related communication technologies.

Parents are considered to be fundamental stakeholders in school-based initiatives and responses (Barrense-Dias *et al.*, 2016; Norman, 2017). Therefore there is need for parents and care givers to be effectively trained on how to assist their children respond and deal with misconceptions and negative consequences of sexting. In the present study it emerged that most parents do not know what their children do with the smartphones and therefore cannot offer guide and direction on how to use internet and mobile phone. As earlier pointed out, sexting has been found to be related to results of parenting styles, communication systems within the family or cultural value systems in the family and wider community (Hasinoff, 2012; Walker, Sancu & Temple-Smith, 2013; Ringrose *et al.*, 2012). As earlier noted, parents rarely delve into discussing explicit sexual matters with their children and therefore educational initiatives that promote healthy and constructive dialog between parents and children must be emphasised (Wallis, 2011; Phippen, 2012) Educational initiatives should clearly take care of the development contexts such as proper use of technology to empower oneself. Blocking and muting unwanted conversations is one strategy that youth in the present study used to protect and empower themselves when interacting with others online. They observed that they sometimes blocked or ‘muted’ contacts they did not wish to send and receive contents. One girl retorted, “, *if i give you*

my phone number then after sometime you ask for my picture i just block you i have over 230 people i have blocked on WhatsApp i don't like anyone telling me to him my picture" (F6INT). Another girl who was asked to send her naked photos by an online strangers on Facebook described it this way: ".so he like he was not from Kenya he was from Spain it tried to talk rude to me but the fanny thing i did was that because i always get mad easily i just blocked him from my account" (F3INT). Parents and caregivers should be trained on how put measures to control, monitor and check ways children use internet and mobile applications. For instance, how to limit the amount of time young people use on mobile phones and internet, and inspecting the contents contained in these devices. Experiences of participant of the present study revealed that a lot of exchange of explicit content takes place at night when parents and siblings are asleep. One girl noted, "Yeah i chat at night" (F16INT). A male participant said, "i communicate with different guys, i have Phillipian friends whom we communicate at night... ok with my colleagues we chat and even you record your voice so that you can send to each other such things" (M5INT).

Furthermore parents and caregivers need to be taught how to support children in case they discover are engaging in sexting activities. They also need to understand how to offer guidance and moral support incase children suffers psychological torture caused by risky online activities. Majority of the participants of this study felt that parents are likely to reprimand children instead of offering guidance and support in case they know about their sexting activities. In one of the FGDs, a female participant expressed how some parents would get tough when dealing with sexting involving with their children, "because they will use themselves an example, in our days we never did that, who told you , who taught you that , have you seen me posting nude photos...."(FG05). In fact, most participants observed that they would not seek guidance and support from parents in case they suffered social harms occasioned by sexting gone wrong for fear of being perceived as 'bad children' . One girl was of opinion that parents should not even know about sexting activities performed by their children, let alone offering guidance, "first of all, it's like you have downgraded yourself to your parents, first how do you explain, parents will ask what you were thinking when recording such staff...so i would not advise anyone to go to parents, in fact they should not even know yeah..."(F17INT). Review of literature indicates that parents operate without the right information or little understanding about sexting and its associated harms (Wallis, 2011; Madigan *et al.*, 2018; Judge, 2013; Ringrose *et al.*, 2014; Sasson & Mesch, 2014). This justifies why there is need to educate parents in order instill the required skills and knowledge on way they ought to do to support their children in matters related to sexting and other risky behaviours

Exonerate young people

Exonerate the young people construct presents the extent to which children and adolescents should not be blamed and prosecuted with child pornography law, but instead protected and supported to develop into responsible adults. In most jurisdictions, harsh

penalties in form of child pornography laws are stipulated to prosecute anyone guilty of being in possession of sexually explicit images or videos of a minor. Nevertheless, child pornography laws do not distinguish whether minors who are found with such images/photos face the same severe legal consequences (Eraker, 2010; Hasinoff, 2015). Furthermore, the law does not provide guidelines on whether consensual sexting that take place in romantic relationships among young adults is subject to the similar harsh penalties. The model recommends that when developing laws, there should be distinction between sexting that occurs in healthy, consenting sexual relationships among adolescents or young adults and aggravated sexting which takes place in contexts of blackmail, coercion or child predation (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011).

Most scholars have suggested that the laws on child pornography need to be reviewed to accommodate sections that protect children, teens and young people against blackmail and predation by adults (Eraker, 2010; Hasinoff, 2015; Boyd, 2011; Burkett, 2015). Instances of sexting that should not be protected by the law, includes adults soliciting images from minors, minors or adults deliberately distribution private images of others, or a minor blackmailing or coercing another to release the naked photos, and other forms of criminal-related sexting activities (Eraker, 2010; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2010). Laws need to recognise that in most cases sexting among young people take place in the contexts of dating relationships, peer social interactions, sex exploration, identity formation, emerging sexuality and other harmless settings (Doring, 2014; Albury *et al.*, 2013; Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014; Phippen, 2012; Burkett, 2015). Harris *et al.* (2010) observe that sexting between minors should be handled at family and school levels rather through punitive legal procedures. Consequently, we require remedy of the law only when there is sufficient evidence that sexting intention was to cause harm, harass, shame or abuse the victim (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2010; Eraker, 2010).

However, as earlier pointed out, there should be conscious effort to educate the youth on their rights and responsibilities with respect to the law and the legal consequences of some of the sexting behaviours they partake. Students need to be educated on how to ask and receive consent in order for them to have healthy relationships with peers and colleagues. The law should provide for establishment, support, promotion and development of other alternative education and restorative solutions. In other words, focus should shift from prosecuting of the youth with pornography laws to prescribing mandatory counseling, education and reconciliation for youth found guilty of aggravated sexting. Similarly, Harris *et al.* concur that instead of the punitive judicial process, schools should develop "antisexting" policies and curricula (Harris *et al.*, 2010).

Technology and industry

In this block, the extent to which social applications used to create and send explicit content videos and photos could be redesigned to provide solutions to problems of unauthorised forwarding is presented. Nearly all participants of the present study observed that

exchange of self-made explicit content is risky and dangerous because the receiver could easily show/ share the photos with other people without consent of the sender. A number of them used safety measures and communicative safeguards to negotiate issues related to perceived consequences. These measures and safeguards were primarily meant to reduce social impact in case their sexting messages were shared beyond the intended recipient. For example, use of slangs and codes while composing text messages, sharing or showing self-made explicit content to trusted and close friends was common. One girl put it, *"they use symbols that if you are not familiar you won't understand so there are some words which we normally use to mean love to mean sex ... like nataka kuroll [I want to have sex]"*(FG03). Common communicative safeguards incorporated sending or showing sexting messages to dating partners or close trusted friends or use of verbal warnings. Use of verbal warnings like *"please do not tell anyone"* were used to request trusted friends not to disclose to other people about the images they saw from the phones. A female interview attendee expressed, *"yeah i saw these videos in my friend's phone and she told me not to judge her wrongly because the images were sent to her the previous day by a boy"* (F1INT). A male participant said, *"he shared the video to show me that he was a man and please don't share the video"* (M11INT). One of the girls who looked at images showing breasts sent to a boyfriend by her trusted friend said, *"ok not all some few friends show me the pictures, what i have seen them send is their boobs"* (F1INT). It seemed that participants had a false sense of privacy and security in the sense that they expected close and trusted colleagues to be responsible to protect the private images.

Participants nevertheless recognized inefficiencies in the safeguards they employed and therefore wished mobile applications used to create and send sexting messages could be developed in such a way that discourages forwarding of such content without consent of the sender. Participants' perspectives seemed to point to several tasks sexting applications should allow them to perform. For example, social applications should give the user more options on how to manage digital content. Creating and sending images without the face was considered a safe way of sharing explicit photographs or videos. One of the girls who sent images of her genitals and breasts said, *"....but i send him without showing my face yeah i hide the face, ok i show him my pussy [genitals] and boobs yeah...."* (F115NT). Generally, participants mentioned that they needed mobile applications that would give them a great deal of control over their digital content especially when creating and sharing private images and videos. One of the male participants put it this way: *something can be done, we are using phones, and these applications were brought by human beings and are computerised, so the owner of WhatsApp can restrict people from receiving and sending those messages, they only need to publish good chats and videos that are of help to the human beings, i think that one can control it.."*(MINT).

However designing mobile applications the way participants described would not completely solve problems associated with sexting. Technology is a social artifact and therefore social norms about privacy and security would determine the degree of success in using redesigned social applications to circumvent the problem of unauthorised

distribution. For example, SnapChat app does not allow forwarding an image/video that is ephemerally present, however someone can still use another device to record and share the image. All in all, the authors of this article concur with participants of the study that technology and industry has a key role to play in addressing negative consequences of sexting. Mobile applications used to exchange private messages could be developed in a way that tightens the noose on easy forwarding, and thus reduce unauthorised distribution. Consequently, we have proposed a number of image processing methods (affordances) that we feel if added to applications used to create sexting messages, would greatly tackle nonconsensual distribution and consequent problem of privacy violations. In the proposed affordances approach, as participants suggested, we envisage management of private digital content at three levels of operations: content, consent and control. Fundamentally, this approach assumes that we cannot address unwanted forwarding of sexting images without thinking about the functionalities that allow people to create and share the sexting content.. Besides redesigning the applications, other industry-based incentives required for this approach to work is change of privacy norms and business models. In **Table 1**, a summary of the suggested video and image processing techniques (affordances) organised according model’s elements is provided.

Table 1: Suggested Functionalities (Affordances)

Levels of Operation	Suggested Video and Image Processing Methods (Affordances)
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apps to incorporate functions that automatically hide or blur the face when one indicates is recording explicit images or videos • Apps to allow the sender to edit the image/video (remove personal details) before sending the image
Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apps that allow marking (locking) of private images/videos/text messages as un-shareable • apps that sends notification to sender if receiver tries to forward images/videos marked un-shareable • apps that destroys images/videos marked un-shareable when shared with third party including connected devices • apps that allow images/videos marked by the sender as private to disappear or delete automatically once the receiver views • apps that allow deactivation of the screenshot function for images/videos/text messages marked as private or un-shareable • apps that reports to the sender when the receiver of images marked private/un-shareable screenshots such images/videos • apps that do not download (save into phone) images/videos marked un-shareable
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apps to include features that track down shared private images and delete all traces of such content on the internet • apps with passwords/patterns to protect folders that contain naked images on phones

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apps that allow sender to share password which receiver shall use to view private images or videos • Apps that prevent sharing images marked private across social media and instant messaging platforms (e.g Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter etc).
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Inertia and Momentum Shift

Inertia and Momentum shift part of the proposed framework represents the extent to which effective education and awareness, legal procedures that protect the youth, and technology and industry initiatives, can either prevent sexting from taking place at all or manage harms associated with the behaviour. The main argument for this block is that with effective educational and technological initiatives, youth sexting can be put at a state of rest or achieve a state of change (shift) towards positive behaviour and perceptions. Linked to the proposal for extensive and intensified education and awareness, described earlier, inertia and momentum shift aims to maintain the impetus achieved through the said initiatives and programmes in addressing issues, problems and opportunities related to sexting. And continue working towards more positive change in making youth understand the demands and perspectives of the behaviour.

There is need for shift of momentum on the way we teach youth about relationships, power relations, role of gender norms on relationships, sexual abuse and assault, dating and violence because all these are related to sexting. There is need for shift of attitudes and behaviours concerning bullying, perceptions about normality of sexting, positive personal behaviour and development, and harmful activities that are therefore unacceptable like blackmail, unwanted forwarding of sexting messages, cyber bullying, harassment and more (Madigan, 2018; Katherine & Twist, 2017).

When education and awareness is effectively delivered, young people will understand and interpret clearly how sexting is as unacceptable behaviour and therefore strive to be responsible in their digital activities. Mere framing sexting as dangerous and unacceptable without proper information will not make youth shift mindset towards eradicating the behaviour. Development of responsible behaviours may mean developing strategies and capabilities to deal with pressure, skewed norms, bullying and antisocial behaviours (Barrense-Dias, 2017; Norman, 2017). Shifting momentum towards increased awareness, skills and positive self-awareness will ultimately make youth to take responsibility of their online and offline activities (Burkett, 2015; Katherine & Twist, 2017).

Shifting momentum may also mean young people becoming ambassadors of protecting integrity of others, and start of valuing privacy of other people. Knowledgeable youth are likely to form part of peer support system that credibly and effectively help colleagues stop in engaging in dangerous online activities and deal with psycho-social problems associated with sexting. Young people who are equipped with the right information are likely through their own initiative form campaign groups that advocate

for end of gender violence, and sexting in the contexts of blackmail and coercion. Furthermore, informed youth could teach colleagues how to live and contribute to positive social change aimed at improving relationships, peer social interactions and strengthening positive social perceptions (Walrave *et al.*, 2014).

Nurture positive behaviours and perceptions

This part of the proposed framework describes the extent to which society, parents, schools and other stakeholders need to work together to reinforce momentum aimed towards nurturing positive social-sexual behaviours and psycho-physical development envisaged in this framework. There is need to nurture 'positive momentum' (change) aimed towards growing and developing initiatives that help and take care of young people who have developed positive social perceptions. Schools should develop initiatives and programmes that nurture talents so that young people have time to focus on constructive life than focus on sexting. There is need to provide visual and text materials and resources that reinforce understanding of negative consequences of sexting and how to make healthy decisions about ones online sexual behaviors.

Furthermore, schools and professional need to develop and nurture initiatives that promotes health sexual discussions between young people and their parents. These sexual health related conversations should tackle negative issues associated with child-parent communication. This will make young people benefit from the experiences of their parents and family support, and also get accustomed to participate in family initiatives meant to assist them make the right decisions (Harris *et al.* ,2010; Wallis, 2010). This kind of support and awareness that come from family members might make young people develop positive self-concept, self-esteem and confidence required to tackle the challenges of the modern day life and use of mobile phones (Norman, 2017). Young people who are adequately nurtured towards positive self-concept will recognise and evaluate situations that pressurise them to share explicit pictures and use the knowledge and strategies they have to deal with such situations. On the flipside, young people who are not nurtured through the right information are likely to yield to social pressure to create and send naked pictures and subsequently suffer consequences of their irresponsible digital actions. (Hasinoff, 2013; Pearce, 2013).

Guide Responsibility

The guide responsibly element of the proposed framework represents the extent to which members of the society can form joint institutions, communities, organizations and forums to research, discuss and develop initiatives meant to address issues related to sexting. As widely discussed in the other elements of the proposed framework, it is important to have joint responsibility of all members of the society when dealing with negative issues and perceptions related to risky online activities. Specifically, relevant stakeholders such as parents and caregivers, teachers and academicians, media practitioners, policy and law

makers, researchers and scientists need to work together to develop relevant programmes and policies, and knowledge-base and information needed address challenges related to sexting and other negative online activities. Scientists and academicians should strive to produce more and more scientific publications that provide relevant information and theoretical explanations of sexting with emphasis on mitigation strategies.. As earlier noted, parents and teachers (schools) associations should jointly work towards developing awareness and educational campaigns aimed at equipping adolescents with information and knowledge on sex, sexuality, relationships, sexting and other digital activities.

Professional organizations and institutions (legal experts, policy makers, education representatives, civil society, youth forums, teacher associations, NGOs etc) need to collaboratively work on legal and policy frameworks, educational curriculum, and other relevant behaviour change communication initiatives. Counselor and therapist professionals must be involved in developing guidance protocols, and online policies aimed at describing how to offer support to adolescents who exhibit pscysocial problems related to problematic online activities. There is also need to develop professional guidelines and mechanisms for peer support systems and parent-child communication in order to foster positive perceptions in peer-social and family interactions.

Technology and Industry professionals and software development community have a role in providing safe digital environments for online activities and appropriate business models that not only focus on profit making but promote protection of privacy and security of users. Media professionals should participate in development and promotion of healthy online experiences and presentations

At this juncture, it is important to reiterate that initiatives and policies developed from joint efforts are crucial because sexting is a complex and multifaceted social issue that should benefit from solutions suggested from diverse and inclusive viewpoints, as earlier pointed out. Collaboration between relevant stakeholders is paramount in order to address wider social perceptions about sexting. There is need to address all the dimensions of the behaviour; cultural, educational, developmental, gendered, power and social hierarchies and more, and this legitimately underscores the importance of joint collaboration of professionals and other relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

This article posit that in order to address issues related to youth sexting, we requires a collaborative framework where the different elements and processes of socialisation work together to support children and adolescents develop into responsible people regardless of information communication technologies. Arguably, this holistic approach requires both the internal and external factors that make up the social environment where young people grow and live to collaboratively work together in order to develop youth with the right personalities, norms and perceptions about their online and offline behaviours.

Consequently, the article proposes a framework that seeks to address issues and misconceptions of sexting from a holistic perspective.

The framework suggests seven constructs that are used to conceptualise and discuss how the different socializing agents could jointly produce young people with healthy sexual behaviours and online activities. These constructs are derived from the word **SEXTING** and include: Societal accountability, Education and awareness, Exoneration of young people, Technology and industry, Inertia and momentum shift, Nurture positive behaviours and perceptions, and Guild Responsibility. As highlighted earlier, use of the word **SEXTING** to suggest constructs for the proposed framework implies that sexting is a social issue and therefore solutions to the problematic aspects of the activity could be found in the same social environment in which it is practiced. This broad approach spells out the responsibility of key agents of socialisation, and clearly describes how they could contribute towards the process of addressing issues related to sexting and shaping youth into responsible people.

The framework shows that solutions to problems of sexting could be found through collaborative efforts of teachers, government, parents, peers, and appropriate professionals-through development of programmes, initiatives and structures that teach young people skills and competences needed to act responsibly, both online and offline. The proposed framework is conceived to have two interacting zones; information and knowledge, and actions and sustainability. The idea is that to address problems related to sexting, we need to extensively and effectively impart young people with the right information, skills and competences which will in turn create awareness and consciousness to act in a responsible manner. Hence, central to the proposed approach is education and awareness which carries much weight in relation to the other parts of the framework.

To enable the framework to work effectively, we suggest that youth perspectives and experiences, and their active participation be considered during design and implementation of education programmes and initiatives. Further, the framework recognises the importance of active participation of professionals, including but not limited to legal experts, counselors, researchers and academicians in order to develop strong links, knowledge-base and forums that are required to support and produce valid information necessary to address the social complexities of sexting. Through joint forums, organizations and associations, professionals and practitioners can create, share and communicate information, and form part of the shared responsibility, strategy and social elements required to provide guidance and address issues, challenges and opportunities related to sexting.

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