

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF UNDERGRADUATES OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (FUTA), AKURE

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ABSTRACT

Considering the fact that social media improves learning possibilities and expands access to knowledge, it has also made it easier for students to access inappropriate sexual content, and misuse of social media has been associated with dangerous sexual behaviours. This study investigated the influence of social media use on the sexual behaviour of undergraduates of the Federal University of Technology, Akure. The study aims to examine common social media sites that respondents commonly use, sexual behaviours that are influenced by social media, social media usage patterns, and exposure to explicit content. Five hundred respondents were purposively selected from among the university's several faculties. Results indicated that respondents were exposed to sexually explicit material on social media, which also impacted their sexual behaviour. Respondents' sexual behaviours included sexting and having explicit conversations with their partners, sharing sexual jokes and memes, and primarily using social media sites for pornographic videos and photo content. The study finds that young people, in general, and undergraduates, in particular, are engaging in sexual behaviours inconsistent with societal norms at an alarming rate. It was recommended that the Federal University of Technology, Akure management consider including media literacy programmes in academic courses. These programmes can empower students to critically analyse and navigate the influence of social media content on their attitudes and behaviours toward sexual relationships.

Keywords: Influence, Social media, Sexual behaviour, FUTA undergraduates.

INTRODUCTION

Social media are computer-mediated interactive tools that facilitate the developing and exchange of knowledge, concepts, and other forms of expression through online communities and networks. According to Radcliffe & Lam (2018), there are more than two billion social media users worldwide, and usage is growing rapidly daily. The average internet user is reported to have eight different social media accounts. According to Radcliffe and Lam (2018), research has shown that messaging apps like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, YouTube,

Snapchat, Instagram, and WeChat are growing much faster than more established media outlets like television and radio (Radcliffe & Lam, 2018).

Notwithstanding, in a study that was carried out by Internet World Statistics (2019), it was estimated that thirty-seven per cent of the African population uses social media, with about 200million people subscribed to Facebook across Africa, and 17 million are said to be based in Nigeria while 16 million in South Africa. Similarly, the Pew Research Centre (2018) observed that internet use in the sub-Sahara is the lowest regionally, with a median of forty-one per cent across six countries, including Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania.

Furthermore, Clement (2019) reveals that Nigeria had 92.3 million users in 2018, which is projected to be 187.8 million in 2023. As a result of the findings, Clement (2019) mentions that sixty-three per cent of adolescents in Nigeria use social media, with the majority of them accessing the internet through their mobile phones. Ekpenyong and Turnwait (2016) note that social media accounted for more traffic of Nigerian undergraduates on the internet than any other services and sex-related activities are a significant attraction.

Ekpenyong & Turnwait (2016) argue that wanting to be admired, touched, loved and cared for by another person keeps most undergraduates, considered young people, attached to social media platforms. Ekpenyong and Turnwait (2016) maintain that social media platforms provide a unique atmosphere conducive to expressing and discussing all forms of sexuality without the traditional oversight of parents and other family members.

Nevertheless, social media has been investigated to have some influence on youths' behaviour, especially undergraduates; as a result of their peculiarity, this influence could be good or bad. The lower age limit for admission into Nigerian tertiary institutions is 16-17 years, which implies that many undergraduates are adolescents and often fall victim to peers/social pressures. Usually, these undergraduates live away from home without parental guidance/control; the liberal atmosphere of the university environments and the use of technology to support educational activities increases exposure to risky online activities (Ajagunna, 2017).

Thus, Ajagunna & Oladeji (2017) posit that risky sexual behaviour is increasing at an alarming rate among undergraduates, and social media use has been implicated due to exposure to sexual content online. Again, Ajagunna & Oladeji (2017) argue that various information, including sexual-related information, are transmitted among young people across the world via these social media platforms, with undergraduates being exposed to social media content featuring substance abuse, sexual risk, and violence, which has led to the public discourse of how social media cause more harm than good to the young adult population. However, little is known about how well the youth individually engage in such content and information (Stevens et al., 2019).

Therefore, existing studies such as Amoo, Adetoto&Olawale-Isaac, and Owlale-Isaac (2013; Ashiekpe & Ugande, 2017; Asrese&Mekonnen, 2018) investigate the influence of social media use on the behaviour of undergraduates. However, studies examining how social media influences the sexual behaviour of undergraduates are limited. Thus, this is the gap in this

study; particularly, this study investigates the influence of social media use on the sexual behaviour of Federal University of Technology, Akure undergraduates. In line with the preceding argument, this study was guided by the following objectives: Observe the common social media platform frequently used by the Federal University of Technology Akure undergraduates. Examine sexual behaviours influenced by social media and find out the social media usage patterns and exposure to explicit content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While examining how the use of social media has influenced young people's behaviour in Kwara State, Onasoga et al (2020) note that undergraduates' unrestrained use of social media has paved the way for exposure to illicit sexual content online and misuse of social media sites, both of which have been linked to risky behaviour among undergraduates. The study's findings strongly correlate undergraduate students' exposure to social media content and risky behaviour. According to Onasoga et al. (2020), interventional methods must be planned by parents and other stakeholders to prevent undergraduate students from using social media to see illegal information.

Several studies have also sought to establish a connection between undergraduates' exposure to social media content and their sexual behaviours. For instance, Orozco-Olvera, Shen, & Cluver (2019) claimed that consuming sexual content in media causes university students to engage in more sexual activity. According to France & Roberts' (2015) study, young people who were exposed to more sexually explicit media had higher rates of sexual activity.

As a result, information on social media is starting to show a positive correlation between it and sexual behaviour, including the development of intimate relationships and the practice of unsafe sex and multiple sex partners (Ajayi, 2010). According to studies conducted in Nigeria by Adebayo, Udegbe, and Sunmola (2006), Iwokagh, Agbana, and Agbana (2014), and Kujuni (2012), electronic media exposes young people to dangerous sexual behaviour.

Again, Adebayo, Udegbe, & Sunmola (2006) found that gender and the internet greatly impacted sexual behaviour when examining the association between gender, internet use, and sexual behaviour orientation among young Nigerians. As a result, they showed that male participants reported a greater level of hazardous sexual behaviour inclination than their female counterparts as internet use grew. Similar findings were found in Ashiekpe & Ugande's (2017) study on the impact of social media sexting on young people's sexual behaviour in Nigeria. Sexting has flooded social media platforms with pornographic content and all social media users are advertently or inadvertently vulnerable to this growing trend.

This survey also revealed that Nigerian youth and adolescents are having sexual relations and reaching puberty earlier than in the past. Another finding from the Business Day (2013) survey indicated that those who use social media sites like X, formerly Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, are more likely than people who use other kinds of media to be exposed to sexual activity. Additionally, they noted that adolescents who use social media but only have a primary education are more likely to engage in sexual activity. There is still a sizable gap to be filled in the research on social media use and sexual behaviour despite all the studies that were mentioned above. For instance, this trend among undergraduate students in Nigerian

universities was not examined in any of the studies mentioned above. The objective of this work is to close this gap.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The uses and gratification theory is the foundation for this study's theoretical framework. The theory dates back to the 1940s when American scholars wondered why people watched conventional media, particularly radio and television programming like soap operas and game quiz shows. The majority of studies came to the conclusion that different people use the media for various reasons and motivations.

According to Katz et al. (1973), cognitive needs include using the media to acquire information, knowledge, and understanding; effective stands for emotional needs include pleasure and feelings; and personal integrated needs include social integrity and tension release. Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) argued that people use the media for five important reasons: cognitive, affective, personal integrated, social integrity, and tension release needs. Ruggiero (2000) outlined three significant types of use and enjoyment for the internet and new media. Internet content consumers need specialized information that is satisfied by the content. Users of the process find satisfaction in the experience of using the internet for functional purposes, whether they are surfing at random or with a purpose.

Social media users rely on and develop relationships through their social networks. Understanding how and why undergraduates use social media to satisfy particular needs and gratifications is possible thanks to the uses and satisfaction hypothesis. Thus, this hypothesis is crucial to understanding why college students with access to mobile devices and the internet may purposefully alter social media information to suit their demands. Through an online survey of first-year college students in Texas, Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) revealed that undergraduates joined Facebook to socialize with their peers and seek status and social recognition.

Facebook use was significantly correlated with other pleasures, including self-confidence, civic engagement, and feelings of personal fulfillment. The uses and fulfillment theory emphasizes that undergraduates use social media to fulfill various demands. However, hormonal shifts cause sexual curiosity to surge in undergraduates, which may lead to an interest in sex. Given that people are accountable for the information they create and consume (Peter & Valkenburgs, 2011), easy access to explicit sexual content online (Wusu, 2013) may further intensify the desire for sexual fulfillment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To comprehensively explore the connection between social media and sexual behaviour among Federal University Technology, Akure undergraduates a descriptive research design was adopted to determine the influence of social media use on sexual behaviour. A Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 500 from various faculties who were randomly selected willing to participate in the study. The respondents were purposively selected because they were considered individuals with social media accounts. Hence, need to examine the tendency of exposure to sexual content and the possible influence on behaviour resulting in selection. The sample size was determined using Fisher's formula as follows;

where $n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$ number of sample, $z = 1.96$, $p = 0.3$, $q = 1 - p$, $d = 0.05$.

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire, which elicited information on socio-demographic data, common social platforms frequently used by respondents, and the extent to which social media influences the sexual behaviour of the respondents. Colleagues and experts in the field of study did the face and content validity of the instrument. In contrast, the instrument's reliability was determined using the Split-half reliability test and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained, which showed that the instrument was reliable. Of the 500 copies of questionnaires administered to participants, 452 were retrieved and found suitable for data analysis. Thus, the response rate was 90.4%. The data collected were coded using Statistical Product Service Solution (SPSS) version 22.0 and subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency tables and percentages.

RESULTS

Table1

Demographics of Respondents (n=452)

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	218	48.2
	Male	234	51.7
Age	16-20	281	62.1
	21-25	135	29.8
	26-30	36	7.9
Marital status	Single	438	96.9
	Married	14	3.0
Level	100-200	182	40.2
	300-400	153	33.8
	500	117	25.8
Religion	Christianity	261	57.7
Total	Islam	191	42.2
		452	100.0

Table one shows more male participation in the research, with a percentage of 51.7 compared to female participation. Also, age variation shows 16-20 years having more participation in the research while single respondent's active part in the research as indicated by their marital status. Similarly, in terms of programme level, 100-200 students participated more in the study as most were Christians.

Table2

Social media usage patterns and exposure to explicit content(n=452)

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Do you have access to the social media?	Yes	452	100.0
How do you access the internet?	Laptop	137	30.3
	Phone	315	69.6
How often do you access the Internet daily?	Several times a day	412	91.1
	Once a day	40	8.8

What social media platform do you frequently visit?	Facebook	72	15.9
	X	52	11.5
	Instagram	216	47.7
	WhatsApp	112	24.7
How much time do you spend on social media daily?	1 hour and above	391	86.5
	Less an hour	61	13.4
What is your purpose of using social media	For academic purposes	118	26.1
	To connect with friends	289	63.9
	To have access to trending event	45	9.9
Total		452	100.0

Results in Table two indicate that 452 respondents (100.0%) had access to social media. As indicated in the result, most of the respondents accessed the internet using mobile phones instead of the laptop. Results also showed that most respondents visited social media daily, as Instagram was considered the most visited social medium. Similarly, more respondents agreed to spend more than one hour on social media and justified connecting with friends as the purpose of using social media.

Table 3
Sexual behaviour influenced by social media (n=452)

Sexual behaviours	Frequency	Percent
Hookup	36	7.9
Sexting and explicit conversation with sex partner.	122	26.9
	86	19.0
Visiting social media for erotic video/photo for sexual excitement.	9	1.9
Accessing social media for sexual material to increase the urge to masturbate.	148	32.7
		11.2
Sharing of sexual humours and memes with sex partner.	51	
Accessing social media for sexual video/photo		
Total	452	100.0

The table above provided results for the sexual behaviour influenced by social media among respondents, as indicated that most respondents engaged more in sharing sexual

humours and memes with sex partners. Also, another behaviour that recorded a significant percentage among respondents is the sexting and explicit conversation with sex partners.

Table 4
Frequency of the use of social media for sexual needs (n=452)

Social Media Use for Purpose	Frequency	Percent
Low Exposure to Sexual content	326	72.1
High Exposure to Sexual content	126	27.1
Total	452	100.0

The results above show that most respondents have low exposure to sexual content on social media. Thus, the participants' exposure to sexual content on social media was measured on a 1 – 5 Likert scale, in which participants' responses to statement items were scored thus: 'Never' = 1, 'Sometimes' = 2, 'Not' = 3, 'Mostly' = 4, 'Always' = 5. The cumulative score of each participant was computed. The mean score was three; therefore, participants who scored below the mean (average) were classified as 'low exposure to social content'. In contrast, those who scored above three were classified as 'High exposure to social content'.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of social media on the sexual behaviour of undergraduates of the Federal University of Technology, Akure. In line with this study's first objective, investigate common social media platforms frequently used by respondents. Findings showed that Instagram was the most frequently visited platform by respondents, followed by WhatsApp, as Facebook and X received low responses. Similarly, results showed that all the respondents were exposed to one social media platform, which recorded 100% responses. The result further showed that the majority of the respondent accessed social media platforms using their mobile phone as opposed to laptops, as visits to social media were recorded daily. Thus, the findings of this study agree with the study of Radcliffe& Lam (2018), who revealed that social media use is skyrocketing daily. These authors further discovered that an average internet user is seen to have different social media accounts. Studies have also shown that messaging apps like WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook Messenger are growing faster than traditional media platforms like Television and radio.

Similarly, the findings of this study support Clement (2019), who mentions that sixty-three per cent of adolescents in Nigeria use social media, with the majority of them accessing the internet through their mobile phones. Ekpenyong&Turnwait (2016) observe t that social media accounts for more traffic of Nigerian undergraduates on the internet than any other services, and sex-related activities are a significant attraction. Findings also align with the assumption of the Uses and Gratification theory, which talks about an individual choosing a particular medium to gratify a need. Hence, undergraduates deliberately choose social media, which may be using social media content to meet specific needs.

The second objective carefully examined sexual behaviours influenced by social media. Findings showed that the sexual behaviour influenced by exposure to social media among respondents included sharing sexual humours and memes with sex partners and sexting and

explicit conversation with sex partners. Other social media sexual behaviours such as Hookups, visiting social media for erotic video/photos for sexual excitement, accessing social media for sexual material to increase the urge to masturbate and accessing social media for sexual video/photo recorded low responses. Although social media is a promising platform to deliver valuable information and helps students to create and share information, ideas and other forms of expression that may be beneficial to their academic success, it has also paved the way for exposure to illicit sexual content and misuse of social sites resulting in risky sexual behaviour (Ajagunna&Oladeji). This finding implies that the more respondents are exposed to social media, the more likely they are to be exposed to sexual content, which may affect their sexual behaviour negatively. This is as Ugande (2017) discovered that excessive technology use is intricately linked to increased risky sexual behaviours. Also, students are using social media negatively at the expense of other benefits they could derive from a positive usage of it. Therefore, undergraduates must be encouraged to use social media sites positively rather than for adverse outcomes such as exploring the social for illicit sexual content.

The last objective investigates social media usage patterns and exposure to explicit content. Findings from the study showed that most respondents have low exposure to sexual content on social media. However, respondents highly exposed to sexual content on social media engaged more in sharing sexual memes, videos, text and photos with sex partners than those with low exposure. Furthermore, respondents highly exposed to sexual content on social media engaged more in viewing erotic videos/photos for sexual excitement than those with low exposure. Similarly, other research studies have documented that social media use influences young people's sexual behaviour (Ajagunna & Oladeji, 2017). The implication of these findings is that respondents who are more active on social media could partake in more risky behaviours because of a more extensive peer network influencing their attitudes and social norms as well as perceived privacy of social media.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has examined the influence of social media on the sexual behaviour of undergraduates of the Federal University of Technology, Akure, who were the respondents of this study. The objectives of this study were to find out common social media platforms frequently used by the respondents, examine sexual behaviours influenced by social media and find out the social media usage patterns and exposure to explicit content. A descriptive research method was adopted for the study where Fisher's formula was used to derive 500 participants who were purposively selected from the various faculties of the chosen institution. Similarly, the uses and gratification theory was also adopted for the study.

Findings showed that respondents were exposed to risky sexual content on social media, affecting their sexual behaviours. Sexual behaviours of respondents were seen in engagement such as Sexting and explicit conversation with the sex partner, sharing of sexual humours and memes with the sex partner and Visiting social media for erotic videos/photos for sexual excitement. Therefore, sexual behaviours incongruent with societal norms are increasing alarmingly among undergraduates and youths. This study has shown that exposure to sexual content via social media use has significantly influenced risky sexual behaviour among respondents. Hence, there is a need for FUTA authority, parents and other stakeholders to

plan interventional strategies to curb the use of social media to view illicit sexual content among undergraduate students.

This study, in line, recommends that the management of the Federal University of Technology, Akure should consider integrating media literacy programmes into academic curricula. These programmes can empower students to critically analyze and navigate the influence of social media content on their attitudes and behaviours toward sexual relationships. Also, social media platforms should implement more robust safeguards to prevent the disseminating of explicit content, especially among younger users. This proactive measure can help mitigate the potential negative impact of such content on 'students' perceptions and behaviours. Lastly, school administrators and lecturers should discourage using social media sites primarily for entertainment among students to prevent exposure to illicit sexual content, which can result in risky sexual behaviour; instead, they should encourage the use of social media sites strictly for academic purposes.

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