

## **Influence of Social Media Use on Sexual Behaviour of Undergraduate Students in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Despite the fact that social media enhances learning opportunities and increases access to information, it has also paved way for exposure to illicit sexual content online and misuse of social sites which has been linked to risky sexual behaviour among undergraduates. Therefore, an institutional-based cross-sectional design was utilized to determine the influence of social media use on sexual behaviour of undergraduate students in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 315 bonafide students. Data were collected using self-developed structured questionnaires and the same were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with level of significant set at 5% (0.05). The study revealed that all of the respondents 304 (100.0%) had access to internet and the majority 264 (86.8%) accessed the internet using mobile phones. Only 100(32.9%) of the respondents had high exposure to sexual content on social media and significant difference was observed in the extent of exposure to sexual contents via social media between the genders of participant with more males using social media for sexual purposes than females. The findings of the study also showed that there is significant association between exposure to sexual contents on social media and risky sexual behaviour among undergraduate students. Therefore, there is need for university authorities, parents and other stakeholders to plan interventional strategies to curb the use of social media to view illicit sexual content among undergraduate students.*

**Keywords:** influence, sexual behaviour, social media, students, undergraduate

Social media are interactive computer-mediated technologies that aid creation and sharing of information, ideas and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks (Kietzman, et al., 2011). Social media use is skyrocketing daily with more than 2 billion users globally (Radcliffe & Lam, 2018; Gabarron & Wynn, 2016). An average internet user is

seen to have about eight different social media accounts and studies have shown that messaging apps like WhatsApp, Wechat and Facebook messenger are growing much faster than traditional media platforms like TV and radio (Radcliffe & Lam, 2018).

It has been estimated that 37.3% of the African population use 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 (Internet Users Statistics for Africa, 2019). Regionally, internet use in the sub-Saharan is said to be the lowest with a median of 41% across six countries which include Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Nigeria had 92.3 million users in 2018 and the figure is said to project to 187.8 million by 2023 (Clement, 2019). Sixty three percent of adolescents in Nigeria use social media with majority of them accessing the internet through their mobile phones (Ekpenyong & Turnwait, 2016).

Risky sexual behaviour is increasing at an alarming rate among the youths and social media use has been implicated due to exposure to sexual content online (Ajagunna & Oladeji, 2017). Various information including sexual related information are transmitted among the youths across the world via these technologies with youths 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 but little is known about how well the youth engage in such content and information individually (Stevens, et al., 2019). Research studies confirmed that risky sexual behaviour is associated with young people and they include: unprotected sex, alcoholism, substance abuse, anal sexual intercourse and mouth to genital contact and multiple sexual partners amongst others (Ahmed, 2014; Imaledo, Peter-Kio & Asuquo, 2012). These risk sexual behaviours predispose youths to several sexual and reproductive health problems like STIs, HIV, unwanted pregnancies, and unsafe abortion which is a major public health issue worldwide (Kassa, et al., 2016).

In order to prevent risk sexual behaviours such as sexually transmitted infection (STIs), the World Health Organization recommends educating people online on sexual health as social media represent powerful channels for health promotion with more than 2 billion active users worldwide (Gabarron & Wynn, 2016). Furthermore, a lot of previous studies have addressed the use of computer- based medium to advocate sexual health but not specifically social media (Bailey, et al., 2012; Gabarron & Wynn, 2016). However, Orozco-Olvera and Cluver (2019) argued that mass media has smaller effects in promoting safer sexual practices due to various illicit sexual content that most young adolescent users are exposed to online.

Social media has been implicated in influencing the sexual patterns and behaviour of youths especially undergraduates as a result of their peculiarity. The lower age limit for admission into the Nigerian tertiary institutions is 16-17 years of age which implies that many undergraduates are adolescents and often

fall victim of peers/social pressures. Usually, these undergraduates are living away from home without parental guidance/control; coupled with the liberal atmosphere of the university environments and the use of technology to support educational activities increases exposure to risky online activities (Asekun-Olarinmoye, et al., 2013, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In addition, there is a general notion that social media exposes youths to illicit sexual content. Parental monitoring has been proven to be vital to parent-child relationships and can moderate frequency of social media use and consequent sexual risk behaviours among secondary school adolescents (Ajagunna & Oladeji, 2017; Kamaku & Mberia, 2014; Kietzman et al., 2011; Landry, et al., 2017). Empirical evidence on the impact that social media has on sexual health behaviours among undergraduates who are usually away from parental influence, while on campus is sparse. Therefore, this study sought to determine the influence of social media use on sexual behaviour of undergraduate students in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

### **Research Methodology**

An institutional-based cross-sectional design was adopted to determine the influence of social media use on sexual behaviour of undergraduate students in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in a tertiary institution in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Ilorin is the state capital of Kwara State, which is one of the six states that make up the North Central geopolitical zone in Nigeria. A Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 315 bonafide students who were registered for 2018/2019 academic session and were willing to participate in the study. The sample size was determined using Fisher's formula as follows;  $n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$ ; where n = 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 extent to which social media influences sexual behaviour of the respondents. Face and content validity of the instrument was done by colleagues and experts in the field of study, while the reliability of the instrument was determined using Split-half reliability test and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained, which showed that the instrument was reliable. The administered questionnaires were retrieved immediately and the process of data collection lasted over a period of 6 weeks. Out of the 315 questionnaires administered to participants, 304 were retrieved and found suitable for data analysis, thus, the response rate was 96.5%. The data collected were coded and imputed into computer using Statistical Product Service Solution (SPSS) version 22.0 and subsequently analysed using descriptive statistics in form of frequency tables and percentages. Inferential statistics in form of Pearson chi square was used to test the hypotheses with level of significance set 0.05 (5%).

The study followed the standard ethical principles guiding the use of human participants in research. Approval of research setting was obtained

before administering the questionnaire. Consent was given by the participants after being assured of no risks involved in answering the questions. The protection rights of the participant were ensured as participants were given the choice to withdraw from the research study voluntarily at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured as names were not required and the filled questionnaires could not be traced to the participants.

### Results

Table 1  
*Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=304)*

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	184	60.5
	Male	120	39.5
Age	16-20	152	50.0
	21-25	146	48.0
	26-30	6	2.0
Marital status	Single	298	98.0
	Married	6	2.0
Ethnic group	Yoruba	270	88.8
	Igbo	14	4.6
	Hausa	4	1.3
	Others	16	5.3
Religion	Islam	200	65.8
	Christianity	104	34.2

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents 184 (60.5%) were females and half 152 (50.0%) of them were between 16-20years of age. Majority of the respondents 298 (98.0%) were single and 270 (88.8%) belonged to Yoruba ethnic group. Majority of them 200 (65.8%) practiced Islam while 104 (34.2%) practiced Christianity.

Table 2 shows that all of the respondents 304 (100.0%) had access to internet. Majority of them 264 (86.8%) accessed the internet using mobile phones, with 230 (75.7%) assessing the internet several times a day. One hundred and sixty-four (53.9%) of the respondents identified Facebook as their most commonly visited site, 150 (49.3%) spent more than an hour on the internet daily and only 114 (37.5%) used the internet for academic purposes.

Table 2

*Common Social Platform Frequently Used by Respondents (n=304)*

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Do you have access to the internet	Yes	304	100.0
How do you access the internet	Mobile phones	264	86.8
	Laptop	36	11.8
	Friends gadget	4	1.3
How often do you assess the internet	Several times a day	230	75.7
	once a day	64	21.1
	One to two days a week	10	3.3
What social media platform do you commonly visit if you are online	Facebook	164	53.9
	Twitter	20	6.6
	Instagram	46	15.1
	WhatsApp	74	24.3
How many hours do you spend on the internet daily	30mins	22	7.2
	1 hour	132	43.4
	More than one hour	150	49.3
Why do you use social media	To connect to friends	100	32.9
	Academic purposes	114	37.5
	To get information about current events	84	27.6
	Seek information on health issues	6	2.0

The participants' exposure to sexual contents on internet was measured on a 1 – 5 Likert scale, in which participants' responses to statement items were scored thus: 'Never' = 1, 'Sometimes' = 2, 'Not sure' = 3, 'Mostly' = 4, 'Always' = 5. The cumulative score of each participant was computed. The mean score was 3 and therefore, participants who scored below the mean (average) were classified as 'low exposure to social content', while those who scored above 3 were classified as 'High exposure to social content'.

Table 3

*Showing Frequency and Percentage of Social Media Use for Sexual Purposes among Respondents*

Social Media Use for Purpose	Frequency	Percent
Low Exposure to Sexual content	204	67.1
High Exposure to Sexual content	100	32.9
Total	304	100.0

Table 3 shows that 204 (67.1%) of the respondents had low exposure to sexual content while 100 (32.9%) of them had high exposure to sexual content on social media.

Table 4  
*Showing the Use of Social Media for Sexual Purpose among Different Genders*

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F test	t	df	p-value
Female	184	1.5	2.17	54.6	-	159.87	0.001
Male	120	2.7	4.25				

Table 4 shows that the number of respondents that used social media for sexual purposes was more in males with a mean value of 2.7 than in females with a mean of 1.5. and was statistically significant (t=-3.02, df= 159.87 p<0.05).

Table 5  
*Chi-Square Test Showing Relationship between Use of Social Media and Sexual Behaviour among Respondents*

Social Media Use for Sexual purpose	Sexual Behaviour	$\chi^2$	df	p-value	Remark	
	Sexual intercourse with same sex					
	Yes	No				
Low Exposure to Sexual content	60	144	29.662	1	0.0001	Significant
	49.2%	79.1%				
High Exposure to Sexual content	62	38				
	50.8%	20.9				
	Viewing erotic video/photos for sexual excitement					
	Yes	No				
Low Exposure to Sexual content	100	104	17.108	1	0.0001	Significant
	57.5	80				
High Exposure to Sexual content	74	26				
	42.5	20				
	Assessing internet for sexual material to increase urge to masturbate					
	Yes	No				
Low Exposure to Sexual content	92	112	4.469	1	0.038	Significant
	61.3	72.7				
High Exposure to Sexual content	58	42				
	38.7	27.3				

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)  
*Chi-Square Test Showing Relationship between Use of Social Media and Sexual Behaviour among Respondents*

Social Media Use for Sexual purpose	Sexual Behaviour		$\chi^2$	df	p-value	Remark
	Viewing pornographic content online					
	Yes	No				
Low Exposure to Sexual content	66	138				
	51.6	78.4	24.196	1	0.0001	Significant
High Exposure to Sexual content	62	38				
	48.4	21.6				
	Accessing the internet for sexual material					
	Yes	No				
Low Exposure to Sexual content	90	114				
	57	78.1	15.334	1	0.0001	Significant
High Exposure to Sexual content	68	32				
	43	21.9				
	Viewing illicit sexual content online to increase attraction to opposite sex					
	Yes	No				
Low Exposure to Sexual content	96	108				
	55.8	81.8	22.879	1	0.0001	Significant
High Exposure to Sexual content	76	24				
	44.2	18.2				
	Viewing sexual content online to increase desire to have fun with plenty of partners					
	Yes	No				
Low Exposure to Sexual content	86	118				
	56.6	77.6	15.26	1	0.0001	Significant
High Exposure to Sexual content	66	34				
	43.4	22.4				

The findings of the study show that there is significant association between exposure to sexual contents on social media and sexual behaviour among undergraduate students. In Table 5, participants who were highly exposed to sexual contents on social media engaged more in sexual intercourse with people of same sex than those who had low exposure. This was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 29.662$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, participants who were highly exposed to sexual contents on social media engaged more in viewing erotic video/photos for sexual excitement than those who had low exposure. This was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 17.108$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Besides, participants who were highly exposed to sexual contents on social media engaged more in accessing internet for sexual material to increase urge to masturbate than those who had low exposure. This was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 17.108$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

## **Discussion**

### **Socio-demographic Profile**

The study shows that about most of the respondents were females which contradict previous study conducted in Ibadan, Nigeria by Arulogun and Ogbu (2016) where majority of the respondent were males. Half of the respondents were between ages 16 and 20years. Similarly, other research studies have also documented that young people between 12 and 24 years of age are the most widely users of new technology and are more likely to be connected to the virtual world, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity (Landry, et.al., 2017; Landry, et al., 2015). Virtually all students were singles and this is not surprising, since the parental belief in the society is that the minimum an individual can achieve before considering marriage is a first degree.

### **Extent to which Social Media Influence Sexual Behaviour of Respondents**

Despite the fact that social media is a promising channel to deliver health information and helped students to create and share information, ideas and other forms of expression, it has also paved way for exposure to illicit sexual content online and misuse of social sites resulting in risky sexual behaviour (Ajagunna & Oladeji, 2017; Kamaku & Mberia, 2014; Kietzman et al., 2011). The results of this study revealed that the percentage of respondents highly exposed to sexual content on social media moderately correlates with risky sexual behaviour ( $\chi^2 = 29.662$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that the more the respondents use social media to view sexual content, the more their sexual activity is affected negatively. This is in accordance with the findings of Landry, et al., (2017) who reported that excessive technology use is intricately linked to increased risky sexual behaviours. Adegboyega (2019) stated that students are making use of social media negatively at the expense of other benefits they could derive from a positive usage of it. Therefore, young adults must be encouraged to use social media sites positively rather than for negative outcomes such as exploring the internet for illicit sexual content.



The findings of this study also revealed that participants who were highly exposed to sexual contents on social media engaged more in sexual intercourse with people of same sex than those who had low exposure. Furthermore, participants who were highly exposed to sexual contents on social media engaged more in viewing erotic video/photos for sexual excitement than those who had low exposure. Similarly, other research studies have also documented that social media use influences adolescents' sexual behaviour as majority of the participants with frequent media use exhibited various risky sexual behaviour (Adegboyega, 2019; Ajagunna & Oladeji, 2017). Landry et al. (2017) stressed that those who are more active on social media could partake in more risky behaviours because of a larger peer network influencing their attitudes and social norms as well as perceived privacy of social media.

Findings of the study showed that there is significant difference in extent of exposure to sexual contents via social media between the genders of participant with more of males using social media for sexual purposes than females ( $t=-3.02$ ,  $df=159.87$   $p<0.05$ ). This means that males are most likely to watch sexually explicit pictures and talk freely about sexual activity than females. This finding is in contrast to that of the study carried out by Adegboyega (2019) where there was no significant difference in the influence of social media on sexual behaviour of youth based on gender. However, it is similar to the finding of Rafferty (2009) done among adolescents in Swindon who posited that there is difference between the usage of social media by boys and girls. The surveyed done by Brown (2008) also revealed that intentional exposure to online pornography and talking online to unknown people about sex is common among males than female.

### **Conclusion**

Sexual behaviours that are incongruent with societal norms are increasing at an alarming rate among the youths. This study has shown that exposure to sexual content via social media use has significantly influenced risky sexual behaviours among respondents with males the most affected. Therefore, there is need for university authorities, parents and other stakeholders to plan interventional strategies to curb the use of social media to view illicit sexual content among undergraduate students.

### **Recommendations**

School administrators and lecturers should discourage use of social media sites mostly for entertainments among students, in order to prevent exposure to illicit sexual content which can result in risky sexual behaviour; rather they should encourage the use of social media sites strictly for academic purposes. Government and other stakeholders should develop and implement stringent guidelines and policy that will curb what is being uploaded and viewed online by undergraduates.

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