ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Impact of Social Media use on Ebonyi State University Undergraduates' Sexual Behaviour

JAPHET AMECHI AGBODO

Mass Communication Department Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki E-mail: jeffagbodo@yahoo.com

Abstract

Social media technology has provided platforms for enhanced human communication and expanded opportunities for self-expression. Despite the numerous gains, this social networking media comes with myriads of limitations: one being the tendency to be abused and/or misused, especially by young people or the young at heart. This study examined the impact of social media use on Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour. The survey research method was adopted. A sample size of 396 students was determined using the Taro Yamane's formula. The study was anchored in the Technological Determinism theory. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.99 through test-retest method. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS 20.0 software. Findings showed, amongst others, that undergraduates of Ebonyi State University are largely exposed to a substantial amount of sexual contents on various social media networks and the exposure negatively influences their psychology towards sex as manifested in the area of dating before marriage as a result of indulgence in interactive and romantic sites. The study recommends the introduction of social media education in higher institutions to help enlighten students on the responsible use of these technologies to minimize the inherent weaknesses and maximize the intrinsic values of utilizing these media platforms.

Keywords: impact, social media, undergraduates, sexual behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

The media landscape is evolving at a startling pace, and a greater diversity of content, new types of media, and social media platforms have been created which can be used to deliver messages across remote distances. The coming of the Internet in general, as well as the advent of newer and more interactive social media platforms in particular, has broadened the horizon of media access, consumption, and consequences. The variety of content available on the internet today is practically limitless and includes what were previously considered as "mass media", or "other media" such as music, newspaper, television games, films, cinema, and many others. All the services rendered by these traditional media are now replaced by modern, robust, sophisticated, and internet-driven devices such as computers, smartphones, cell phones, and so on (Bara, 2009). The portability of these social networking media makes it possible to use them in a variety of settings and conceivably, throughout the day. Young people seem to have immersed themselves with the dynamics of these social networking media with social networking sites, cell phones, and instant messaging playing major roles in their everyday lives.

This makes it imperative to systematically study social media platforms to determine their influence on students' sexual behaviours. This is important, given the emerging evidence from the works of Bavakutty and Salih (1999) and Becker (1995) which linked social networking media use with the initiation of various sexual activities and spread of sexual messages. In line with this direction, Fahmi (2005) observes that researchers may find that these media are also linked to developing sexual attitudes and behaviours that could result in sexual risk-taking with damning health consequences. This study was designed to address this issue by examining literature linking social networking media use to students' sexual behaviours.

Social media refers to special kinds of content created and delivered through the Internet, including social networks and other specialized websites, as well as content delivered on other digital devices such as cell phones and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). Ekweasi (1991) describes social networking media as forms of communicating in the digital world, which include publishing on CDs,

DVDs, and most significantly, over the Internet. Virtually everyone in the developed world is getting involved in the utilization of social networking media especially as the world has become a global village. Social media platforms, to Saleh (2010) and Owan and Robert (2019), are heavy carriers of deviant behaviours and anti-socio-cultural activities like homosexuality (lesbianism/gay), indecent dressing, dating before marriage (social promiscuity), pornography, violence, and poor attitudes towards academic activities. They provide many powerful fora for students to engage in interactive and observational learning since issues like sports, romance, politics, drugs, fashion, violence, alcohol, and vulgar language pervade social media.

Statement of the Problem

There is a gap in the narrative surrounding the impact of social media and increasing moral decadence among young people in the society. Most of the available studies and analyses on the subject have focused either on social media influence and indecent dressing among the youths (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013); social lives and academic performance (Kolan & Dzandza, 2018), mass media and relationship building (Owusu-Acheaw, & Larson, 2015); etc.

According to Owan and Robert (2019), social media platforms are heavy carriers of deviant behaviours and anti-socio-cultural activities like homosexuality (lesbianism/gay), indecent dressing, dating before marriage (social promiscuity), pornography, violence, and poor attitudes towards academic activities.

Not many of such studies to the best of my knowledge have addressed the impact of social media use on Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour. This is to say that a literature search shows paucity of existing intellectual academic conversations on the subject, except for a few that do not have direct bearing on the chosen area. An attempt at filling this academic gap and knowledge lacuna has prompted this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study is meant to:

1. Determine the level of exposure of Ebonyi State University undergraduates to social media platforms.
2. Find out the extent to which social media use influences Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour.
3. Identify the dominant social media platforms that the undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University expose themselves to and how these shape their sexual behaviours.
4. Determine specific measures to ameliorate the impact of social media use on Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour

Research Questions

The following are research questions:

1. What is the level of Ebonyi State University undergraduates' exposure to social media platforms?
2. To what extent does social media use impact on Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour?
3. What are the dominant social media platforms that the undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University expose themselves to and how do these shape their sexual behaviours?
4. What specific measures can be adopted to ameliorate the impact of social media use on Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

The rate at which young people (students), no doubt, use a variety of social media is alarming. The amount of sexual content they encounter varies across these platforms. With the fusion of television, music, movies, cameras, favorite Internet sites, and magazines in Smartphone, iphones, iPads, tablets, etc, students of today have a good dosage of sex contents at their disposal in their social networking platforms.

While theories of media effects emphasize the importance of content, they make differing claims

about which aspects of content are important to measure. Social learning theory and its close relation social cognitive theory, for instance, argue that screen-media exposure leads to the cognitive acquisition of behaviours along with their expected social, emotional, and cognitive consequences (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2003). Exposure to portrayals suggesting that behaviour (sex) will lead to social disapproval or other negative outcomes (e.g., pregnancy, STIs) is likely to foster negative attitudes toward the depicted behaviour, and not promote its enactment. Thus, the content portrayed (sexual or not) and the specific nature of the content (consequences of sex) are critical to measure if one wishes to accurately predict subsequent beliefs and behaviour (Domminick & Wimmer, 2006). One of the findings from a RAND study linking media exposure to sexual behaviour is illustrative. Overall, young people viewing and surfing sexual content at the time of a baseline survey had a greater likelihood of intercourse initiation and initiation of new non coital behaviours by one year follow-up relative to those who viewed less.

Thus, social media users learn not only what is likely to be the outcome of sexual activity, but also whether others engage in it or approve of it, and come to see themselves as more or less able to engage in similar activities themselves.

Also, new/social media are often viewed via portable platforms, such as cell phones and digital devices. As such, there is opportunity for increased exposure as a result of portability, as well as more private exposure. Roberts et al. (2015) have written about the implications of media privatization (the viewing of media while alone) with regard to media effects. They argue that "comments from others may facilitate, inhibit, or otherwise guide understanding and/or acceptance of a given message" (Roberts et al. 2015, p. 12). This is consistent with theories of "parental mediation" of media messages. This theory suggests that Parents and other adults can greatly alter the impact of messages when they discuss them with students. With greater portability of media, we might expect that messages that promote sexual risk will have a greater influence on youth who encounter them and perhaps also that health-promoting messages will have less impact.

Empirical Review

Social networking sites are places where students can encounter sexual text, photos, and videos and can also create and/or post materials themselves. Few studies have attempted to determine the effect of such materials on young people's sexual attitudes and behaviour (Asekum-Olarin et al., 2014; Arelogun et al., 2016; Williams, 2016; Collins et al., 2011; Abdullahi & Abdulauadri, 2018). In a study, Agbodo (2017) revealed that social networking sites allow users to mark some information as private, and what is hidden is probably more personal in nature. Of course, students surfing through profiles will not encounter this private information, but if it was posted publicly or on the profile of an online "friend", they will and this is the more typical way of using social networking services.

Evidently, some studies showed that there is a link between the exposure of young individuals (students) to sexual media content and their sexual activities (Hoff, Greene, & Davies, 2003; Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter & Mill 2004; Henessey, Bleakly, & Fishbein, 2009). There is also a strong evidence that increased sexual activity among individuals (adolescents most especially), is predicted by the viewing of sexual contents in media (Pardun, L'Engle, & Brown, 2005; Brown, Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy, & Jackson, 2006; Bleakly, Hennessey, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2018). In a Nigerian study, Williams (2016) showed through the findings of a study that sex and age exerted sufficient influence on the sexual behaviour of youths but the identity variables seemed only to increase the tendency of younger males to form intimate relationships with partners.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Technological Determinism theory. This theory was propounded by Everret Rogers in 1986. The term was coined by an American Sociologist and Economist, Thorestein Veblen (1851-1929). Technological determinism is a reductionist theory that aims to provide a causative link between technology and a

society's nature. The Technological Determinism Theory maintains that "at some quarters, machines and their aftermath development would drive economic, political, historical and socio-cultural transformation cum change" (Baran, 2004, p.22). One of the assumptions of this theory states that change in communication technology inevitably would produce profound developmental changes in both culture and social media of a system (Mackenzie, 1998). This, according to Baran (2004), is one perspective of the theory. Another assumption of the theory suggests that technology by nature is neutral. The import is that its significance is embedded in the way people apply or use it. The implication of this theory to this study is that many young people do not really have a clear-cut objective of visiting the Internet but they believe a friend is hooked on to the Internet; it therefore becomes a misnomer for them not to be online. As youths surf the net, they join some social networks. This informs the researcher's reason for anchoring this study on the technological determinism theory.

METHODOLOGY

Survey research method was used to collect data for this study. The population under study is the undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. This comprises undergraduate students from five out of eleven faculties of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The population of undergraduate students of the state university under review was put at 16,000 based on data obtained from the Academic Planning Unit of Ebonyi State University.

The study used the Taro Yamane's formula n=N/1+ (N2) to select the sample size; it was pegged at 396 which represents 95% of the entire population.

The sampling techniques adopted for the study was simple random sampling. In this study five faculties were selected from eleven faculties in Ebonyi State University which were randomly selected through a lucky dip method.

The questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured into two sections: the demographic and psychographic sections. The questionnaire was drafted in simple sentences consisting of close and open-ended questions.

The structured questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation. It was also subjected to measurement and critical assessment by two experts. Their contributions contributed to ascertaining the appropriateness and suitability of the instrument.

In conducting the reliability test of the questionnaire, the test re-test technique was adopted using Pearson correlation. The test re-test was conducted in areas not included in the study. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 was used to analyze the data from the two tests and then the results presented. The Pearson correlation coefficient showed a reliability coefficient of 0.99 and above.

396 copies of questionnaire were administered by the researcher with the help of five research assistants, one from each faculty, who were fluent in Igbo and English languages. The research assistants were trained and guided on how to administer and collect filled questionnaire from the respondents. All the copies of the questionnaire administered were returned.

Descriptive statistical method of analysis was used in this study. The statistical tools that were used in analyzing primary data were simple percentage, frequency table, weighted mean and Pearson's chi-square test.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis of this study revealed that 50% of the respondents were males while 48% were females showing that a majority of the respondents were male undergraduates. It was also shown that 18% of the respondents were between 17-20 years, 45% were between 21-25 years, 30% of the respondents were between 26-30 years, while 12% of the respondents were either 31 years or above. This suggests that the respondents are predominantly of the 21-25 years age bracket. For marital status, 5% of the respondents were married, 95% were single, and none (0%) was divorced. This does not come as a surprise since most of the undergraduates fall into the age category that

normally would not be expected to be settling into marriages.

Research question one

What is the level of exposure of Ebonyi State University undergraduates to social media platforms? It was also shown that 95% of the respondents are familiar with social networking media while 5% are not. Also, 95% of the respondents have knowledge of social media platforms while only 5% do not. It was indicated by 38% of the respondents that they have a Facebook account, 20% have WhatsApp accounts, 5% of the respondents operate an Instagram account, 17% own Twitter accounts, while 15% have other accounts, and 5% operated other accounts. It was shown that 24% spend an hour on different social platforms, 35% spend two to three hours on different social platforms, while 41% spend four hours or above. These shows that a great number of undergraduates spend quality time on social media platforms.

Research question two

To what extent does exposure to social networking media influence the sexual behaviours of Ebonyi State University undergraduates? Regarding respondents' appraisal of their activities on social networking media platforms, 13% indicate that they seek for a date on social media, 25% indicated that they meet people on different social media platforms, 30% just chat with friends and relatives, 20% follow up celebrities, 5% of the respondents build up relationships, while 7% showed that they flirt on social media. This shows that the majority of undergraduates are on social media platforms to chat with family relatives and friends. In terms of respondents' appraisal, whether they have seen pornography on social media, 49% agreed to have seen pornography on social media, while 51% disagreed. However, 63% of the respondents agreed that they have been tagged with pornography on social networking media platforms while 37% disagreed. This suggests that a higher percentage of undergraduates are exposed to pornography on social media.

In terms of assessing their membership of any online dating group, 51% agreed that they belong to online dating group, 49% were of the view that they did not belong to any online dating group. Also, 5% of the respondents' had been blocked over a post relating to pornography on social media while 76% indicated that they had not been blocked and 19% said they were not aware. The implication is that undergraduates do not post pornographic contents online; hence they are not blocked, or the pornographic contents they upload are not noticed or are overlooked by who should block them. In terms of dating someone they meet online, 38% indicated that they have dated someone they met online while 62% have not dated. It was also shown that 87% of the respondents agreed to have downloaded and transferred sex videos and photos on their phones and/or personal computer, while 13% have not. It was shown further that 88% of the respondents believed that exposure to social networking media platforms influences their sexual behaviour, while 12% held contrary positions.

It was also shown that 5% of the respondents believed that extra-marital affair is one of the practical ways social media influence their sexual behaviours. 51% believed that double-dating is one of the ways, 25% believed that high rate of masturbation is as a result of social media influence on their sexual behaviour, while 19% see prostitution as a clear practical way in which the utilization of social media influences their behaviours. The results indicated further, that 51% of the respondents use social media platforms to a great extent, 25% to a little extent, 24% said it has no influence on them.

Research question three

What are the specific social networking media that university undergraduates are exposed to? There was a consensus among the respondents that they were aware of different social networking media platforms as they all answered in affirmative, and as well as listing some of the platforms to include Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, 2go, Baddoo, WhatsApp, BBM, to mention but a few.

Many of them were of the view that the different

platforms help them to create and share content, access content others shared, keep tab on friends and socially engage with people irrespective of their affiliations, location, and other social differences. On the commonly used social networking media platforms, a large majority agreed to be using Facebook more than any other platforms followed by WhatsApp. A good number of them believed that the social media platforms affect their sexual behaviour mostly in negative ways such as exposing them to pornography, illicit pictures, and so on. These media, according to them, had a negative influence on them in terms of their sexual behaviours. Data from a good number of them also suggested that such individual negative influences cut across the board, including friends and relatives who have been exposed to social networking media platforms. Also, the majority of the interviewees believed that the social networking media platforms influenced the sexual behaviour of undergraduates to a large extent.

Research question 4

What specific measures can be adopted to ameliorate the impact of social media use on Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour**?**

The analysis showed that 76% of the respondents believe that different social networking media platforms could serve as channels for enhancing positive values in campuses and society while 24% disagree to this position. Furthermore, 51% of the respondents think that posting decent pictures on social media platforms will help to reinforce positive values, 25% think that sharing information with appropriate language would reinforce positive values, 12% believe that sharing information of accepted moral standards will contribute in reinforcing positive values, while 12% believed that government regulation will help in instilling positive values.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Firstly, this study has shown that undergraduates of Ebonyi State University are highly exposed to social networking media platforms. This was statistically established through data analysis.

These findings confirm the earlier position of Ulrich and Harris (2003) that undergraduates have largely embraced social networking media platforms abandoning the print media such as newspapers and magazines that used to be their source of information and enlightenment. These findings also agree with the results of Owan and Robert (2019) which also showed that students' utilization of social media platforms is significantly high. This trend according to them has altered the authority structures and enthroned social disconnection and alienation, making it difficult to monitor and regulate what they are exposed to on different social platforms.

It is symbolic to note that the basic tenet of the Technological Determinism shows that undergraduates are highly exposed to social media and such exposure has directly affected their sexual behaviour. This behavioural change according to Salen (2010) are attributed to the fact that the various social networking media platforms are heavy carriers of deviant and antisocial cultural activities, ranging from minor ones like indecent dressing and online dating to more grievous acts such as homosexuality, gay, lesbianism, sexual promiscuity, pornography violence and warning attitude to academic hard work and excellence.

This study also established that exposure to social media has influenced the social behaviour of undergraduates in Nigeria. This supports the suggestion of Ojih (2020) that Nigerian youths live a life of lost direction. The gradual moral decadence as a result of strong indulgence in Facebook and other social media platforms could be captured in the responses from the qualitative response like; "I personally can attest to the fact that the social networking media have influenced my sexual behaviour to a great extent … I used to be shy discussing sexual related issues, but now, I can comfortably talk about what I want to discuss. I can now double-date, flirt without giving a fuck what people or society say." This goes on to show the magnitude of the impact of social media use on Ebonyi State University undergraduates' sexual behaviour.

This study established that "Facebook" is the commonly used social media platform the undergraduate students are exposed to. This finding supports the result of Owan and Robert (2019) who also determined through an earlier study that Facebook was the most widely used social media platforms followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, Eskimi, Snapchat, Wechat, and skype in that order. The findings of both qualitative and quantitative results also justified this position.

The result of this study extended to show that the exposure of undergraduates to Facebook has tremendously affected their sexual behaviour negatively. Furthermore, this study established that the posting of decent pictures, sharing of good and quality information or videos, including government regulations would help in curtailing the negative influence social media platforms have on the sexual behaviour of undergraduates in Ebonyi State University.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that young people are exposed to a substantial amount of sexual content on social media. This exposure affects their psychological thoughts and attitudes towards sex and predisposes them to sexual risk behaviours which have grave consequences. Facebook is predominantly used by many undergraduates of the selected universities in Nigeria. There is also a suggestion that the behaviour of these students was subject to the negative influence of social media, especially in the area of double-dating, flirting, lesbianism, and other sexual orientation as a result of exposure to pornographic videos, pictures and messages on social media platforms. Student's attitudes towards academic activities are also declining owing to participation in social media sites since the majority of them spend hours chatting and doing other irrelevant things online.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

(i) Enlightenment campaigns by the school management, government, and other Non-Governmental organizations should be conducted among undergraduate students to help them understand the advantages and disadvantages of constant exposure to social media sites.

(ii) The government should adopt some regulatory measures to monitor and regulate the contents shared on social media platforms.

REFERENCES

Abdullahi, A. A., & Abdulquadri, N. T. (2018). New media and adolescents' sexual behaviour in Sub-Sahara Africa: Linking theories to realities. *SAGE Open,* 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018804606

Adesemoye, S. (2015). *New media: connecting or alienating the Nigeria youths?* Lagos: Department of Mass Communication.

Agbodo, J. A. (2017). *Influence of new media on the sexual behaviour of university undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria*. M.Sc. A thesis submitted to the Department of Mass Communication, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.

Arop, F. O., Agunwa, J. N., & Owan, V. J. (2019). Tertiary students' social media management attitudes and academic performance in Cross River State. *British International Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 6(*3), 48-52. Retrieved from https://goo.gl/CizoMe

Arulogun, O. S. Ogbu, I. A., & Dipeolu, I. O. (2016). Influence of Internet exposure on the sexual behaviour of a young person in an urban district of South-West Nigeria. *The Pan African Medical Journal, 25*, 261. https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2016.25.261.2630

Asekun-Olarinmoye, O. S., Asekun-Olarinmoye, E., Adebimpe, W. O., & Omisore, A. G. (2014). Effect of mass media and internet on the sexual behaviour of undergraduates in Osogbo Metropolis, South-Western Nigeria. *Adolescent Health Medicine and Therapeutics, 5*, 15-23. https://doi.org/10.2147/AHMT.S54339

Barran, J. (2009). *Introduction to mass communication media literacy and culture (5th ed).* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bleakley, A., Hennessy, M., Fishbein, M., & Jordan, A. (2018). It works both sexual contents in the media and adolescent's sexual behaviour. *Media Psychology, 11*(4), 443-461. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260802491986

Brown, J. D., L'Engle, K. L., Pardun, C. J., Guo, G., Kenneavy, K., & Jackson, C. (2006). Sexy media matter: Exposure to sexual content in music, movies, television, and magazines predicts black and white adolescent's sexual behaviour. *Paediatrics, 117*(4), 1018-1027. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2005-1406

Chan, J., & Ghose, A. (2014). Internet's dirty secret assessing the impact of online inter-mechanises on HIV transmission. *MIS Quarterly, 38(*4), A955-A963. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2035585

Collins, R. L., Martino, S. C., & Rand, R. S (2011). Influence of new media on adolescents' sexual health: evidence and opportunities. Working paper available at: http://aspe.hhs.gov/hs/11/AdolescentSexualActivities/NewMediaLitRev/

Hoff, T., Greene, L., & Davis, J. (2003). *A national survey of adolescents and young adults: sexual health knowledge, attitudes and experiences*. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family foundations.

Kereke, C. E., & Lucky, U.O. (2014). The impact of social media on the academic performance of university students in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice, 5*(33), 21-34.

Oche, M. (2018). *Nigeria: social networking and the future of students.* Nigeria: All Africa Global Media.

Odoemelam, C. C., & Adibe, K. N. (2012). The Role of Social Media in Political Conflicts and Political Communication in Africa. In D. Wilson (Ed.), *The media, terrorism political communication in Nigeria*. Lagos: African Council for Communication Education (ACCE).

Ojih, T. C. (2006). The Nigerian youth and the challenges of cultural revival. In N. Ojiokor & I. Ojih (Eds.), *Readings in Nigerian people and culture*. Enugu: NGIB publishers.

Okafor, I. I., & Obi, S. N. (2005). Sexual risk behaviour among undergraduate students in Enugu, Nigeria. *J. Obstet Gynaecol, 25*(6), 592-595. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443610500239511

Owan, V. J., & Robert, A. I. (2019). Analysis of the utilization of social media platforms and university students' attitudes towards academic activities in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Prestige Journal of Education, 2*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijpbs. 20190402.12

Pardun, C. J., L'Engle, K. L., & Brown, J. D. (2005). Linking exposure to outcomes: early adolescents' consumption of sexual content in six media. *Mass Communication & Society, 8*(2), 75-91. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327825mcs0802_1

Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja. S. (2010). Trends in online social networking: Adolescent use of Myspace over time. *New media & Society, 12*(2), 197-216. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809341857

Sonaike, S. A. (2004). The internet ant the dilemma of Africa's development. Gazette: *The International Journal for Communication Studies, 66*(6), 42-51. https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549204039941

Williams, E. N. (2016). Social networking, identity and sexual behaviour of undergraduate students in Nigerian universities. *The Electronic Library, 33*(3), 534-558. https://doi.org/10.1/08/EL-01-2015-0014

Young, S. D., & Rice, E. (2010). Online social networking technologies, HIV knowledge, and sexual risk and testing behaviour among homeless youths. *AIDs Behaviour, 15,* 253-260.