

IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS IN NIGERIA: MORAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

There is growing concern about young people's exposure to sexual content through new media and about its potential effects on their sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Although sexual content in the media can affect any age group, and exerts an enormous, almost a normative influence, over the lives of men, women, adolescents and children, the adolescents are particularly vulnerable and account for a disproportionate number of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infection diagnoses. In fact, the alarming increase of rape, teenage pregnancies, septic abortions, and sexually transmitted infections, especially human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), among adolescents in Nigeria makes the research into the effects of the new media on their sexual attitudes and behaviors quite appropriate. The adolescent use of these media occurs simultaneously with their developing identity, emerging sexuality, physical development, and moral consciousness. The concern of the paper is the extent to which the frequent consumption of media with its high and low sexual content and low levels of portrayal of responsible sexual conduct is a causal influence on adolescents' subsequent sexual behavior. The study established that there exists a relation between exposure to sexual content on new media and the sexual behavior of adolescents, and an increasing degradation of Nigerian cherished moral values and norms. Based on the findings that electronic media content has a significant influence on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of adolescents the paper recommends, among other things, urgent steps by all agents of socialization towards sensitization on media use.

Key words: New media, Adolescents; Sexuality; Social media and sexual behaviour,

INTRODUCTION

Today's world has been described as a social media world where considerable hours and money are invested on new media sources. According to a report, one out of every five minutes globally is expended on network services (Barnes & Laird, 2012). In Latin America alone, up to 8 hours a day is spent on social network services. More than 22 percent of teenagers log on to one form of social media or the other over 10 times a day (Gwenn & Kathleen, 2011). According to a Common Sense Media poll in 2009, over 75 percent of teenagers now own cell phones. The use of iPhone is becoming appallingly high, about 25 percent use them for social media, more than two third engage them for texting and messaging while one out of every five teens have used them to send or post pornographies (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011; Gwenn & Kathleen, 2011). New media offer innumerable opportunities such as speedy communication, social connections, and boosting of technical skills (Gwenn & Kathleen, 2011). They are specific avenues for connecting with friends (both old and new), sharing of interests and, of course, business transactions.

Negative information such as pornography accessible via media channels are said to have an adverse effect on how adolescents think, feel or act sexually (Dietz , 1990; Greenberg, B.S; Busselle, R.W, 2004). Furthermore, sexuality has been used as a symbol to portray different messages aimed at catching the attention of the viewers, through forms which include: musical videos, television advertisements and romantic movies. The ease of access of this information through the readily available media channels (such as mobile phones, laptops) creates a major dilemma in adolescent sexual behavior. The electronic media, which consists of many social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram etc., is characteristic of an in-flock of sexual contents and materials. More worrisome is the fact that these communication trends have been on a rapid increase even as the world of technology improves. Although many schools have created strict rules that restrict the use of handheld technology during school hours, many adolescents are still able to connect during school hours as they please, causing distractions as well as having a negative impact on their sexual and overall behaviors.

Although studies have been carried out on the adolescent sexual behavior among adolescents, many adolescents continue to experiment with risky sexual behaviors at younger ages. Age at sexual debut has decreased drastically particularly in urban slums, a reality however is that adolescents in less or fairly urbanised areas also now have access to virtually all media resources their counterparts in urban areas have. Most studies on adolescent sexual behavior are anchored on adolescents in urban area and there is insufficient data on adolescents' sexual behavior and the probable influence of media use on their sexual behavior in 'averagely' urbanised areas of Nigeria (Adedimeji AA, Omololu FO, Odutolu O, 2007).

In Nigeria, one-quarter (25%) of adolescents are said to be sexually active with the age debut ranging from 10 to 15 years (Punch 16, 2017). The risk of acquiring an STI is higher among teenagers than among adults and almost 4 million cases of STIs are diagnosed in adolescents each year. In 2017, Nigeria was next to South Africa as the second largest prevalence of HIV in Africa. Adolescents between the ages of 15 to 24 have prevalence rate of 4.2%, while 160,000 adolescents age 10 to 19 are HIV infected. Table 1 presents prevalence of HIV among Adolescents and Young People in Nigeria.

Table 1: Prevalence of HIV among Adolescents and Young People in Nigeria

| | | North-Central | North-East | North-West | South-East | South-South | South west | All |
|--------|-----------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-----|
| All | Age Group | | | | | | | |
| | 15-19 | 2.5 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 1.0 | 4.1 | 2.8 | 2.9 |
| | 20-24 | 2.1 | 3.0 | 3.2 | 1.3 | 5.8 | 2.9 | 3.2 |
| | 15-24 | 2.3 | 3.1 | 3.3 | 1.1 | 4.9 | 2.8 | 3.0 |
| Male | 15-19 | 2.5 | 3.7 | 5.6 | 0.7 | 3.9 | 1.7 | 2.9 |
| | 20-24 | 1.3 | 1.5 | 5.0 | 0.5 | 3.5 | 1.8 | 2.7 |
| | 15-24 | 1.9 | 2.6 | 5.3 | 0.6 | 3.7 | 1.7 | 2.4 |
| Female | 15-19 | 2.4 | 2.9 | 1.6 | 1.3 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 2.8 |
| | 20-24 | 2.8 | 4.0 | 2.1 | 1.8 | 7.5 | 3.7 | 3.7 |
| | 15-24 | 2.6 | 3.5 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 5.9 | 3.8 | 3.3 |

NACA 2016 National HV Strategy for Adolescents and Young People

The most commonly reported STI among Nigerian adolescents are HIV and Chlamydia. In 2017, 17 percent STIs and HIVs were recorded among adolescents in the southeastern part and 14 percent in the northern part of the country (Punch, March, 2017). “In southwestern Nigeria, 27.4 percent unintended pregnancies among adolescents in a secondary school all ended in abortion, while other studies recorded about 60 percent.” The Lagos State NURHI Team leader observed that, Nigeria reports a yearly rate of 25 abortions per 1,000 women, more than a quarter of which are from adolescents, as a result of unwanted pregnancy. He further maintained that “In the southern part of Nigeria, about 32% cases of unsafe abortions were among adolescents who had unwanted pregnancies.

Many factors may expose adolescents to the risk of becoming sexually active at early age. Some of the most important risk factors are culture, religion, poverty, peer pressure, the use of drugs and alcohol, marijuana, and parental influences. One potential but largely unexplored factor that may contribute to sexual activity among adolescents is exposure to sexual content in the mass media to which the average Nigerian youth spends one third of day, and the majority of that exposure occurs outside of parental oversight. Although mass media have been shown to have an influence on a broad range of behaviours and attitudes (including violence, tobacco and alcohol use, surprising) few studies have examined its effects on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours. And this has prompted this essence of this paper at these crucial times.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a simple method which carried out an extensive review of relevant literature linking the sexual content of various media to adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors. After the usual clarification of terms which follows the introduction, the benefits and risks of social media on adolescents behavior and attitudes were examined. Some theories relating human sexual behavior with media and the range of their effects on adolescents were also briefly discussed, before their moral implications were proffered. The conclusion is followed by some recommendations.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

For this study, “Impact” refers to the influence of media content on adolescents’ attitudes and behaviors. The term “sexual attitudes and behaviors” are used to include beliefs, values, and decision-making, as well as attitudes and behaviors.

Adolescents

“Adolescents” and its cognates are variously defined, as are the exact boundaries of “teenagers” and “youth.” The lines between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood may differ by culture and region. The World Health Organization defines “true adolescence” as “the period of physical, psychological and social maturing from childhood to adulthood,” which may occur anywhere between the ages of 10 and 24. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) uses the terms “adolescents and young adults” for those aged 10 to 24, inclusive. This is usually broken into 3 age groups (ages 10 –14, 15–19, and 20 –24). At the same time, the US National Library of Medicine, in its Medical Subject Headings (MeSH terms), defines the adolescent as “a person 13 to 18 years of age,” whereas the PsycInfo database uses the ages of 13 through 17. Although teenagers may legally be adults at the age of 18, they are not for the most part adults developmentally, emotionally, behaviorally, or socially; most high school seniors are living at home with their parents. For purposes of this study, “adolescents” are those 11 to 19 years old, and the terms “teens,” “teenagers,” and “youth” may be considered synonyms.

Adolescents are individuals (male or female) who are experiencing the onset of physical/sexual maturation and reproductive capacity. They have numerous needs and their rights to know about their bodies, to be educated and informed about their sexual health must be protected. As expected, they face myriads of social, emotional, psychological and cultural challenges (Amoo & Adeyemi, 2010; Schmied & Tully, 2009) especially in receiving and gaining access to the right information about sexuality. Their needs also include the desire to be independent, starting employment, advancing cognitive abilities, negotiating and changing relationships including family and peers and broader social connections (Schmied, & Tully, 2009). At this period of transition from

childhood into adulthood, they face innumerable challenges and are most often desperate to be informed on a number of issues especially reproductive health matters (Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth & Wartella, 2003). Wherever and whenever their quests are not satisfied, adolescents can resort into any available means to satisfy their quest and access the perceived needed information. For examples, they could learn from other siblings, friends, school mates, etc. In addition, it has been discovered that the greatest influence can come from the media such as television, song lyrics, magazines, movies/videos, games and most recently from the internet, facebook, 'whatsapp', 'instagram' and skype, to mention but a few (Coleman & Shane, 2011).

New Media

New media is an umbrella-term which includes different technologies. In the opinion of some specialists new media include both blogs, podcast, video games, virtual worlds, Wiki encyclopedia, and other mobile devices, interactive televisions, and even the websites and e-mail. Others consider that blogs and virtual worlds must be included in the category of social media because they are encouraging appearance of virtual communities and social networks. For this paper, "New media" refers to content created and delivered via the Internet, including social networking and other specialized kinds of websites, as well as content delivered on other digital platforms, such as cell phones.

To be distinguished from mass media, new media, are a combination resulting from the growing need for information and free expression of opinions, be they political, social, cultural, or technological. Mass-media, on the other hand, are "ways of communication that involve transmitting information in a certain way or form to a large number of people" (Chris Livesely, Central Sociology, 2011 www.sociology.org.uk) or as defined in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian language*, the "totality of technological means of mass communication of information (television, press, radio, Internet, cinema, etc.)". (DEX – Romanian Academy edition).

According to these definitions, new media could be classified as a branch of mass media. New media, however, are different from traditional media, primarily by being a

combination of the two dominant communication media until a decade ago: interpersonal medium (one-to-one) and mass communication (one- to-many) (Crosbie, 2002). A conclusive example of this is the e-mail, which can transmit personal information from individual to individual, or send the same message of global concern to hundreds, thousands or millions of people.

Having positive and negative aspects, pros and cons, the fact is that new media allow the user to choose the information that s/he wishes to receive daily. S/he selects it from a variety of sources, and checks its usefulness. The information is available any time with just a touch of a button. The traditional mass-media, such as cable television, apparently offer a multitude of choices in terms of television broadcast, but each TV channel has certain rules in selecting the information.

OVERVIEW OF BENEFITS AND RISKS OF NEW MEDIA USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Benefits and appeal of social media

As a system, new media has brought immense changes to life especially among children and adolescents round the globe. It offers opportunity for people to contact with their loved ones easily notwithstanding the distance, watch television without television, buy and sell products without physical touching (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011). As a medium, it helps children and adolescents, especially the school going, to learn and accomplish many vital tasks/assignments. It has the potential to facilitate the building of individual and collective creativity through development and sharing of artistic and musical endeavors and other novel ideas. Health-wise, new media has succeeded in breaking the jinx of traditional silence on myriad reproductive taboos and behaviours. Excellent health resources are increasingly available to youth on a variety of topics of interest such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), contraceptives, medication adherence, and meeting appointments with health officials. Overall, social media use is associated with many benefits for adolescent health and development. An examination of youth's experiences with social media, reveals that:

Social media provides adolescents with the opportunity to strengthen existing friendships

and to form new ones. (O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications and Media, 2011). Research shows that teens are mainly using social media to communicate with pre-existing offline friends and spend time together, make plans, discuss everyday issues and gossip (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). The development of a secure and firm sense of identity and the development of sexuality are two other important tasks of adolescence. Self-presentation and self-disclosure are important skills necessary to accomplish these tasks; social media provides teens with a place to learn, practice, and rehearse these skills (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Teens can explore and shape their identity by choosing what information and aspects of themselves to share and also with whom to share it (Moreno, 2012). Based on the feedback and reactions they receive from peers, they may modify their self-presentation (Moreno, 2012, Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). The validation and acceptance they receive is important for the development of a healthy self-esteem and positive sense of self. In a survey of 600 9-18 year old children and adolescents who visited online chat rooms and used instant messaging, half reported that they did so to see how others would react to them, overcome shyness, or make new relationships (Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter 2005).

The Internet can afford some degree of anonymity and, compared to face to face interactions, teens find it easier to stop and reflect on what they want to communicate before doing so, and this asynchronicity and anonymity can be especially helpful for teens that are normally shy or anxious in face to face interactions. (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). These teens are thus able to practice social skills in a manner that is less threatening or uncomfortable. Those who are self-conscious about their appearance or body image may feel more comfortable communicating online where they can be judged based on their personal interaction instead of their physical appearance (McCarty, Prawitz, Derscheid, & Montgomery, 2011). The degree of anonymity afforded by the Internet is also greatly appealing to teens suffering from shame, isolation and distress (Whitlock, Powers, & Eckenrode, 2006). Social media can be very attractive for teens whose interests differ from those of mainstream culture (Moreno, 2012). These teens can connect with others who share their interests, a unique opportunity to further develop their specific hobbies or interests.

Teens can also use these sites to express creativity and share their creations (O’Keeffe et al., 2011). Teens can post their writing, music and other artistic pieces. Feedback on these pieces can allow them to develop their creative talents and may facilitate interaction with those who have similar talents or interests. In addition, teens can use social media to work on school projects with their classmates outside of school.

The Internet can be a useful source of health information and education, which can be easily accessed by teens. Although some of the medical information on the internet can be misleading or inaccurate, there is a benefit to teens being able to access accurate medical information online (Mitchell & Ybarra, 2008). Due to the anonymity of the Internet, adolescents may feel more comfortable searching for sensitive health topics online than elsewhere (Mitchell & Ybarra, 2008). They may be more likely to search the Internet for topics like sexually transmitted diseases, depression, pregnancy or birth control. Among young adults online, 75% have used the web to get health information (Rideout, 2002). About 1 in 4 young people ages 15-24 have used the Internet to look up information on weight loss or weight gain, depression or other mental illness, violence or problems with drugs or alcohol (Rideout, 2002). Berger and colleagues (2005), in a large national survey of internet users, found that individuals with a stigmatized illness such as depression or anxiety “were significantly more likely to have used the Internet for health information, to have communicated with clinicians about their condition using the Internet”, or “to have increased utilization of health care based on information found on the Internet”. Through social media teens can connect with others with similar illnesses or medical concerns. Teens can learn more about their illness and receive reassurance or validation by joining awareness or support groups.

Risks associated with social media use among adolescents

Display of Risky Behaviors

As teens explore their sexuality and identity on social media sites, they may post images, videos or text referencing risky behaviors including substance use, sex and violence. Teens may display this material on their pages in various forms including pictures of themselves or others engaging in these acts, comments or posts about their participation

in these behaviors, photos, or quotes referencing these behaviors. Teens may not be aware of the significant risks associated with displaying such behaviors on their pages.

First, these posts are public (to various degrees) and can be easily shared or viewed by others. These posts may influence how the teen who shares this information is perceived by others. College admission committees, job recruiters or other adults may pass judgment or make negative assumptions about the adolescent based on what information is displayed on their page (Moreno and Kolb, 2012). This can result in a teen's not getting accepted to a college, being disciplined at school or getting fired from employment.

Second, there is the concern that social network sites act as a "superpeer," normalizing risky behaviors and encouraging adolescents to engage in them, especially if they are perceived as free of negative consequences (Moreno, 2010). In a focus group study by Moreno, Briner and colleagues (2009), adolescents ages 11-18 viewed alcohol references on social network sites as representative of actual use and displays of real behavior. Adolescents in this study also viewed these references as attempts to "look cool" or to gain social acceptance. The researchers expressed concerns about how these behaviors could promote the use of alcohol, especially among younger adolescents.

Third, display of risky behaviors may encourage unwanted expectations in others. In another focus group study of male college students by Moreno and colleagues (2011), male college students reported that sexual references on females' social networking sites increased sexual expectations among the males. The display of risky behaviors on these sites can place teens at a higher risk of being targets for sexual victimization (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2007).

Sexting

Sexting has received considerable attention in the media. Sexting refers to the "sending or receiving of sexually- explicit or sexually-suggestive images or video via a cell phone". It can also refer to sexual messages in texts and through other electronic devices (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2012). The prevalence of sexting varies widely

among studies and depends on how the term is defined, the age group being studied, the methodologies used and the form of media used for sexting. Prevalence rates among youth have been found from 4-28% for sending sexts and 13-31% for receiving sexts. A more recent national study depicted lower rates of sexting when the term was restricted to include only images which were sexually explicit (depicting bare breasts, genitals and/or bottoms). When this narrower definition of texting was applied, only 1% of teens had admitted to appearing in these images or videos and 5.9% had reported receiving these explicit images and videos (Mitchell et al., 2012). Age has been shown to be the main predictor for sexting, as older teens engage in this behavior more frequently.

Why do teens engage in this form of risky behavior? Adolescence is a time characterized by the exploration of one's sexual identity. Social media has become a place where this type of exploration often occurs. In a focus group study of adolescents conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, teens shared how sexting can be a form of relationship currency. They described how sexts are often sent as a part of sexual activity or in lieu of sexual activity, and can be sent in order to start or maintain an existing romantic relationship. They also discussed how sexts may be subsequently passed along to friends for their entertainment or as a joke. The female adolescents in these focus groups also reported feeling pressured by boys they were interested in to send these images and messages.

Cyberbullying and Internet Harassment

Cyberbullying is described as the "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). It has garnered significant attention in the media in recent years, mainly due to multiple high profile cases of teen suicides attributed to this newer form of bullying. Mental health professionals who treat adolescents frequently encounter patients who have been bullied online and witness the negative psychological impact of cyberbullying on their patients. Common forms of cyberbullying include spreading rumors or sending hate messages; creating profiles, webpages or videos for humiliation; distributing inappropriate photos or videos and sending threatening, malicious or hurtful messages. Cyberbullying has been

difficult to study for several reasons and therefore the actual prevalence and other characteristics of this behavior have not been accurately or consistently described.

Studies have shown that cyberbullying can have serious mental health consequences. Children and adolescents who experience cyberbullying both as victims and as offenders have lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, school and academic problems, more delinquent behaviors and higher rates of suicide (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, 2010a, 2010b, Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Victims of cyberbullying have reported lower school performance and academic achievement (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012). They were less likely to attend school, were more likely to have difficulty concentrating on their school work and received lower grades than students who were not bullied (Beran & Li, 2007). It is not clearly understood why this occurs.

Social Media and Suicide

As adolescents are increasingly using cell phones and social media as main forms of communication, they are more likely to use this technology to communicate and share their distress and suicidal thoughts with others. The Internet, for example, can be a source of support for teens who are experiencing emotional distress, depression or suicidal thoughts. Teens can find others online who are going through similar experiences, enabling them to feel more connected and less isolated. Through online communities, adolescents can seek guidance on how to get help and overcome distress. Adolescents can learn what has helped other adolescents who have gone through similar problems. Suicide prevention and support websites can facilitate help for adolescents and relief for suicidal thoughts. In contrast to the availability of these prevention and support sites, there are also numerous sites where teens can easily access information on how to commit suicide, and sites where teens are encouraged to act on their suicidal thoughts. Biddle et al. (2008) conducted an internet search for sites providing information on methods for suicide using twelve suicide related search terms including “suicide”, “suicide methods”, “how to kill your- self”.

They analyzed the first 10 sites which resulted from each respective search. 240 different websites were identified in all. 90 of these were found to be websites dedicated to

suicide, and half of these encouraged, promoted or facilitated suicide. Websites which provided factual information about suicide, pro-suicide websites and chat rooms discussing suicide were typically among a search's first few results. It is likely that the pro-suicide sites appeared so frequently in this study due to the specific pro-suicide search terms. However, it is alarming that websites providing such information can be easily accessible to teens who search online using the search term "suicide."

What follows is a brief summary, not a thorough survey, of mass media influence on other health-related behaviours of adolescents:

a) Aggressive Behaviour

Youth violence, as a public health issue, has been on the increase in Nigeria, since the fourth Republic was inaugurated in 1999. Numerous studies have investigated the association between media violence and aggression, with many focusing on children and adolescents (Samaila, 2017). The studies have revealed a positive and strong correlation between exposure to media violence and aggression. The relationship has been strong enough to cause government intervention in terms of policy formulation or passage of bill to address the issue.

b) Tobacco and Alcohol Use

From the record of tobacco and alcohol use in Nigeria, the North West has the highest statistics of 37.47% substance use in Nigeria. World Health Organization (WHO) statistics reveal that more than 16,100 Nigerians are killed by tobacco disease yearly (Altas, 2015). The current tobacco smoking rate shows that 25% children (10-14years) use tobacco. Furthermore, the youth account for 32% of tobacco smoking with male and female constituting 20% and 12% respectively. Altas 2015 report further shows that Nigeria has 4.5 million adult smokers, which unfortunately expose about 27 million others to harmful smoking. Advertising has been linked to be very effective in increasing teenagers' awareness of and emotional responses to product (identification of brands, desire to test advertised). Cigarette advertising seems to increase teenagers' risk of smoking by show casing smoking and smokers, thereby portraying smoking as an act worthy to be engaged in (Anderson, 2006).

Alcoholic drinks are the most common beverages advertised on the print and mass media. Dumbili (2013) stated that exposure to alcohol, advertising and TV programming is related with Nigerian adolescents positive beliefs about alcohol consumption. He observed that some youth attribute their intake as a result of exposure to television adverts. A study conducted by Williams (2016) found that about 6 million bottles of codeine are sold on a daily basis in the North Western part of the country. National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) report for 2010 shows that about 11% of people in North-West zone use drugs. WHO statistics on North-Central Nigeria show that 38.7% (11-20) had taken alcohol at least once in their live, while the prevalence of beer was 28.1 and 17.1

Vanguard (2018) noted that Delta youths have resorted to blending methylated spirit and other chemicals with soft drink to ‘get high’. The paper further maintained that “dry gin getting high”, which is elevating one’s state of mind or consciousness, is a deadly drug consumption habit that has turned into a hobby to youth in several parts of Nigeria. Supporting Vanguard’s report, Daily Post, noted an alarming rate of fake beer and laboratories manufacturing illicit drinks and beer that are dangerous to human health.

According to the daily Post, the National Food and Drug Control (NAFDAC) Chairman, Dr Abubakar Jimoh lamented over the increase in fake drinks in Plateau, Benue, Gombe and Bauchi states. He particularly decried the rampant consumption of drinks like “Ogogoro” (dry gin) and ‘gokolo’ by youths, and urged stakeholders to join in the fight “especially since the youths are the group most affected”. “We have found that the youths rely on such drinks to gather enough courage to commit all manners of atrocities like armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, killing and the rest.”

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEW MEDIA USE AND ADOLESCENTS SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

The potential for mass media to influence behavior has been supported through a number of different psychosocial theories, hypotheses, and models. Although there is considerable variation in theoretical mechanisms by which media might affect adolescents’ sexual attitudes and behaviors, most posit that sexually related message

content and behavior act over time as stimuli to change consumer psychological, physiologic, and behavioral function. Some of these theories are discussed below:

i. Social-Learning Theory

Bandura's social-learning theory (Bandura, 1986) one of the most prominent of these theoretical mechanisms, provides ample evidence that even when children and adults have not actually performed a behavior, they can learn by imitation. Bandura identifies 3 main processes involved in learning: direct experience, indirect or vicarious experience from observing others (modeling), and the storing and processing of complex information through cognitive operations. This theory suggests that behaviors are learned and that they are influenced by social context: "Television is seen as an increasingly influential agent of socialization that produces its effects through children's propensity to learn by imitation." (Peterson, Moore, Furstenberg (19191).

ii. Disinhibition Theory

Disinhibition theory posits that existing behavioral tendencies of children and others are inhibited by experience.(Comstock, 1989). Continued exposure to television (TV), however, disinhibits viewers, making them more accepting of the behavior (National Institute of Mental health, 1982).

iii. Priming Theory

Research has shown that exposure to an event (i.e. sexual stereotypes) from the mass media activates other similar ideas for a short time afterward. (Jo et al, 1994). These thoughts, in turn, can activate other semantically related concepts and make them more accessible.

iv. Arousal Theory

Arousal theory focuses primarily on the immediate effects that sexually suggestive material may have on behavior. TV content, for example, can produce general emotional and physiologic arousal (i.e. activation of the nervous system rather than specific sexual arousal) that is likely to elicit some type of individual and contextual behavioral response.

v. Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory posits that heavy exposure to mass media creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media-directed version of reality than with reality itself (Gerbner, et al, 1994). Media portrayals and messages might affect the behavior of young

persons over time by enabling them to acquire new attitudes and behaviors or by changing the likelihood that they will perform new or previously learned responses. This may occur when a child's expectations about the outcome of certain behaviors are altered through identification with the character portraying or providing the stimuli, by raising or lowering behavioral inhibitions, by modifying the potential for environmental cues to foster certain behaviors, or by linking specific meanings to a behavior.

vi. Media Practice Model

This model was developed to explain media use in a comprehensive and contextual framework (Steele and Brown, 2002) and highlights the connections between adolescents' identities and media selection, interaction, and application (Steele & Brown, 1995): "This model assumes that youth choose media and interact with it based on who they are or who they want to be at the moment." (Brown, Steele, Walsh, 2002). Theoretical research is borne out by communications-related survey data. Advertisers recognize that the content of their messages will have an effect on consumer purchasing behavior (Williams, 2000). Additionally, young people report that media messages are an important influence in their lives (Kaiser, Hoff, Davis, 1996) and that they receive important information about life choices from the media (Kaiser, Hoff, Green, Davis, 2004).

vii. Third-Person Effect Hypothesis

The third-person effect hypothesis states that people tend to perceive mass media messages to have a greater impact on others attitudes and behaviors than on themselves (Davison, 1983). A practical way of looking at third-person effect is that messages "have little effect on people like you and me, but the ordinary reader is likely to be influenced a lot." This phenomenon may be exacerbated for adolescents and may lead to underreporting of decision-making factors.

viii. Super-Peer Theory

This theory posits that the media can represent a potent source of information for teens as to what is normative behavior (Strasburger, Wilson (2002), Strasburger 1997) and may indeed exceed the influence of an adolescent's more traditional peer group.³⁰ The effect of exposure to attitudes and behaviors portrayed in mass media may be compounded by the glamour typically associated with those appearing in it (both the characters and the

actors playing them). Moreover, TV programming targeted to youth takes advantage of the attraction of children and teens to characters they perceive to be 2 or 3 years older than they themselves are (Mitroff, 2005) —“peers” with whom they typically cannot socialize but whom they long to be like. Such characters, although older than the child’s peer group, provide templates for the child’s “aspirational” behavior (Mitroff, 2005). In short, youngsters model themselves after those who they want to be not those who reflect who and what they currently are.

ix. Power of the Indirect

Whatever the correct theoretical underpinning(s), data suggest that messages embedded in other media types are more powerful than direct advertising appeals when it comes to influencing behavior. Advertising is influential, but perhaps because teens have now become more marketing savvy, they tend to resist direct appeals to change their behaviors and are better persuaded by subtle, embedded messages (Zollo, 2003). The result has been greater use of nontraditional marketing approaches such as “viral” marketing (any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others), using “trend-setters” as communication sources, and e-mail. Such nontraditional sources de-emphasize the advertising aspect and highlight content to minimize the consumer’s sense of being manipulated, which explains why product placement is so popular in movies and TV: it is indirect and subtle but powerful (Zollo, 2003). The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign (sponsored by the Office of National Drug Control Policy) conducted a qualitative and ethnographic study throughout the country in 6 markets during August 2003. Teens were asked to use a diary to keep track of all drug messages (pro-drug and antidrug) with which they came into contact across all media sources for a 2-week period, after which focus groups were held. The main finding was that pro-drug messages were perceived by all teens as more powerful and compelling than antidrug messages primarily because of their subtlety and embedded nature (Ogilvy, 2003).

INTERNET SPECIFIC MEDIA

Some inter-based media (e.g. social networking sites, chat rooms) also provide youth the opportunity to construct and “try on” identities that may not fit the users’ off-line selves while interacting with others; one can be any gender, race, age or level of physical attractiveness online. This unique property is particularly relevant to a stage of life

characterized by a search for one's identity and an attempt to integrate sexuality into that. If adolescents use this opportunity to try on sexualized identities, social media use might result in youth making or receiving more offers of sex than would be the case if the same time were spent passively viewing sexual materials on television sets or in film.

(a) Pornographic websites

A broad literature has examined the influence of pornography exposure on young adults, using both correlational and experimental designs. These studies have, for the most part, looked at traditional media, such as films and magazines, and focused on young men. Their reports have suggested a range of effects that one might expect to observe among adolescents exposed to pornography on the internet. Such effects include more permissive sexual attitudes, over estimation of various sexual activities engaged in by others, and less satisfaction with one's own sex life. (Ifeyinwa,2014). This is further confirmed by Envaldu, Kwaak, Zwanikken and Zoaka (2017) who found that those exposed to pornographic materials through a variety of media (including internet pornography and traditional media) were subsequently more likely to report permissive sexual attitudes (e.g., acceptance of casual or premarital sex), and to have oral or vaginal sex than youth with less exposure.

(b) Social Networking Sites.s

Social networking sites are places where youth can encounter sexual text, photos, and videos and can also create and/or post such materials themselves. No study has attempted to determine the effect of such materials on young people's sexual attitudes and behavior even though a few have examined the potential for this by documenting the sexual content of these sites. A social networking site allows users to get some information as private, and what is hidden may probably be more personal in nature.

(c) Chat rooms

Adolescent chat rooms appear to be highly sexualized environments, which affect their sexual behaviour. In an early analysis, it was found that sexual comment was made every

four minutes in a sample of 321 minutes of conversation from skype, teen chat rooms, observed during after-school and weekend hours.

(d) **Sexual solicitation.**

Online sexual solicitation is defined by most researchers as the act of encouraging someone to talk about sex, to do something sexual, or to share personal sexual information even when that person does not want to. Solicitations have received a great deal of public attention, largely because of fear that they may result in the rape or abduction of adolescents by adults. As a result, the literature focuses primarily on determining the likelihood of these risks. It is important to note that more benign solicitations (e.g. solicitations between acquainted same age youth) may also be of research interest. Such solicitations could theoretically influence the ways that youths think about sex, fostering perceptions of casual sex as normative, and perhaps as menacing or harassing. They might also influence sexual activity, if solicitations are accepted.

PREVALENCE AND TRENDS OF MEDIA USE

Both the usefulness of new media in addressing issues of sexual health and their potential role in placing youth at risk depend critically on the extent with which such media are in use. In 2010, the Kaiser Family Foundation surveyed more than 2,000 young people aged 8-18 years from across the United States regarding their media use. Results indicate that media continue to play a central role in young people's lives. Youth spend a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes each day using various media, including television content, music/audio, computers, video games, print material, and movies (and excluding texting and talking on cell phones, though the use of cell phones as a platform for other media, such as music or video, was included). More time was spent with television content than any other medium by far, with television accounting for nearly 4.5 hours of media use. Music/audio was second, accounting for about 2.5 hours of time. Nonetheless, newer media computer use and video game use, accounted for 1.5 and 1.25 hours of youths' media time, respectively. And a large minority (20 percent) of media consumption (about two hours) took place using mobile platforms, such as cell phones, laptops, and handheld

game players, confirming that media consumption is now extremely flexible in terms of time and place of use. This may account for the somewhat counterintuitive rise in time spent with television over rates observed in 2005, even as more time was spent with newer media. A selective overview of adolescent media use is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Time Spent with Various Media in a Typical Day Among U.S. 8- to 18-Year-Olds

| Media Type | Hours: Minutes |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Television | 4:29 |
| On a television set | 3:28 |
| On the Internet | 0:24 |
| On an iPod/MP3 player | 0:16 |
| On a cell phone | 0:15 |
| On a computer (DVD/video) | 0:06 |
| Music | 2:19 |
| iPod/MP3 player | 0:41 |
| Radio | 0:32 |
| Computer | 0:32 |
| On a cell phone | 0:17 |
| Compact disc | 0:17 |
| Print | 0:38 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Movies (in-theater) | 0:25 |
| Computer | 1:29 |
| Social networking | 0:22 |
| Games (on- and offline) | 0:17 |
| Video sites | 0:15 |
| Instant messaging | 0:11 |
| Email | 0:05 |
| Other websites | 0:11 |
| Other | 0:08 |
| Video games (not online or on computers) | 1:13 |
| Console | 0:36 |
| Handheld device | 0:21 |
| On a cell phone | 0:17 |
| Texting | 1:35 |
| Talking on a cell phone | 0:33 |

Source: Rideout VJ, Foehr UG, Roberts DF. *Generation M2: Media in the lives of 8- to 18-year-olds*. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation; January 2010.

Note: The study did not include texting and talking on a cell phone in the estimate of total time with media. Some numbers have been calculated from data tables, and some forms of media studied have been omitted from the table.

TABLE DESCRIPTION: This table presents time spent, in hours and minutes, with various media in a typical day among U.S. 8- to 18-year-olds.

MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENTS IN NIGERIA

Despite the advantage of Social media on the economic and social life of adolescents and youths, the episode has given rise to some moral issues in Nigeria. The negative influences available on these social sites and the moral issues that have arisen from their abuse and obsession have not only deepened the level of immorality among the youths in the country, new acts of immorality have also emerged. For lucidness, some of the influences and their implications are discussed below:

Sexual Promiscuity

The level of moral decadence in Nigeria has become repugnant. The previous invaluable moral values and norms have regrettably been ruined, while immorality now reigns especially among the youths. According to Yaro (2013) “gone are the days when morality and discipline used to be virtues. Today it is the exact opposite. We now live in a decadent society where morality and discipline are (thrown) overboard”. This is evident in the current level of sexual promiscuity among the youths in the country. Lanre-Babalola, (2018) has also observed that “sexual immorality has become the talk of the day in the country as one is regarded as the greatest by the number of sexual partners he/she has in the name of lovers. Thus, social ills that are erstwhile strange and alien to the Nigerian norms and values, are increasingly becoming ornaments of adornment common in the country.

Internet Crime

The emergence of the internet saw the emergence of internet or cyber-criminals commonly known as internet hackers and scammers. Whereas internet hacking is the act of breaking codes and passwords to gain an unauthorized access to a computer system, scamming is a clever and dishonest way of making money. These twin criminal acts are fondly known in Nigeria as “yahoo-yahoo” which literary means a consistent surfing of yahoo-chatting device in endless search for victims. Nevertheless, it is particularly interesting how one can be at a particular place and commit crime thousands of miles away-this is the power of the internet. The phenomenon of social media has unfortunately added to their options, as these internet criminals see these networking sites as avenues to achieve their ignoble and immoral missions. This is evident in the case of moral

decadence portrayed in the case of late Cynthia Udoka Osokogu who was defrauded and killed in August 2012, by two people she met through the Blackberry Messenger (BBM).

Indecent Dressing and Sexual Harassment

The problem of indecent dressing and the consequent sexual harassment in Nigeria, especially in tertiary institutions, has been made worse by the phenomenon of social media. Some, if not all, of these social media sites often provide room for users to upload and share pictures and videos. Unfortunately, these provisions have been abused as many users share pictures of themselves or celebrities wearing skimpy clothes while some appear wearing their pants or trousers below their waste in the name of sagging. All these exposures have really affected the mode of dressing in Nigeria especially among the youths both in and out of school, which partly account for the increase in the rise of rape cases in the country.

Loss of the Sense of the sacredness of Human Life and Neighbourliness

Respect for the sanctity of life and good neighbourliness are very important moral injunctions and demands by culture and religion in Nigeria. Indeed, these moral values are integral parts of the moral norms and values of virtually all societies, including Nigeria. However, many Nigerian youths seem to have discarded these values as a result of the addiction to the social media. This is evident in the manner with which critical events that concern human lives are currently being handled by these youths in the country. Nigerian youths have regrettably been turned into onlookers in times of emergency and disaster with no concern or regard for the dying-lives desperately in need of help. Umekachikelu (2013) noted that, since the advent of the social media in our country, the loss of the sense of dignity is on the increase. Young people in the name of being the first to know, forget the sacredness of the human life that we were known with. This is evident in the attitude of our young men and women towards life. It is not surprising these days that, in the face of a disaster in which people are maimed, injured or killed, youths rather than coming to their rescue only care about taking pictures or recording of the disaster and the victim with their phones and then upload the images to YouTube, Facebook or other online forums.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the new media has facilitated sweeping changes to occur before the eyes of our youths and our traditional beliefs. It has revealed an association between frequent internet use and permissive sexual behavior so much so that the new media is a significant predictor of adolescent sexual behavior. Based on the findings from this study, the paper concludes that electronic media content has a significant influence on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of adolescents and raise a new set of issues for educators, parents, researchers and policymakers in Nigeria to consider.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Sex educators should pay special attention to the influence of popular media on the sexuality of adolescents. Such attentiveness will reflect in the content of sex education curriculum which would be geared towards counteracting the misgivings of popular media on human sexuality. They can help teens think about online presence in moral and ethical ways - especially in understanding the consequences for themselves and others of participation in the socially networked world.
- 2) Sex education should train adolescents to abhor debased sexual materials common in print and especially electronic media. This may be achieved by including in sex education modules specific and practical guide on the selection of videos, movies, music videos, novels and magazines that are properly censored and free of sexually immoral and provocative contents. It would also be useful for such guidance to include appreciation for video ratings often published on movie packs like +16, +18, X-rated, and so on; with specific instruction on the need to steer clear of those with sexually explicit contents.
- 3) Sex educators should consider employing electronic media in sexuality education. Specifically, sex education programmes should be designed and dispensed digitally in the form of movies, music videos, and animated videos. It is useful to assume that much the same way as popular media appeals to adolescents, a well-designed electronic presentation of sex education will be effectively assimilated. Being iconic and absorbing as the regular movie viewing, such programmes will

be thoroughly internalised as they immerse the adolescents in moral and pro-social sexual ideals. Adolescents would therefore learn from the media and develop healthy sexuality.

- 4) It may be impossible to shield children and adolescents from exposure to all media messages that adults consider inappropriate or potentially harmful, yet it is possible to help them learn how to distinguish messages that are designed to sell products, messages that are products in themselves, and messages that are informative or entertaining. It is possible to guide them to media messages that encourage safety and good health and away from messages that promote unhealthy or high risk sexual behaviors.
- 5) Sex education and awareness fora should be created and introduced at all levels of our educational systems in Nigeria, for students to have a better understanding of the effects of social media on their lives, and this could help guide their perception, attitude etc. towards sexuality and reduce the high risk the adolescents are prone to sexually.
- 6) Greater resources need to be allocated to schools, libraries and community organizations to assist them in adopting risk management strategies and to provide education about online safety issues. Resources are needed for social services and mental health professionals who work with minors and their families to extend their expertise to online spaces and work with other members of the community to identify at-risk youth and intervene before risky behavior results in negative outcomes (Beckman, 2008).
- 7) Internet providers such as Google and Yahoo, and social networking sites, such as Facebook and YouTube, need to continue to work with parents and policy makers to create awareness and opportunities for privacy protection of youth and to develop technologies that can assist teens in staying safe.
- 8) Medical and mental health providers need to include routine screenings to assess risk for depression that consider a teen's social media use. For example, assessing the amount of time spent using media including online activities or inquiring about online contacts (close friends vs. strangers, teen's willingness to meet

someone offline, incidence of being harassed, harassing others). Tools should be developed to help providers engage in these conversations.

- 9) Schools need to update media literacy guidelines to include explicit information on successful participation with new media forms, online risks, and education about consequences of their media use, including laws that pertain to them. Non profits need to maximize the opportunity to reach teens through social networking that teens are already using (e.g. social networking sites, video and gaming sites, and blogs) to share their own content.