

Social Networking and Adolescents' Behavioural Problems (Drug abuse, Bullying and Cultism) in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the influence of social networking on adolescents' behavioural problems (Drug abuse, bullying and cultism) in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population for the study was 14,739 from 14 public secondary schools in the study area, and a sample size of 601 students was selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. Data obtained were analysed using Mean and simple regression analysis. Results showed that Facebook was the most frequently used social networking site. Findings also revealed that social networking had significant influence on drug abuse ($P < .05$) and cultism ($P < .05$), but the influence on bullying tendency was not significant ($P > .05$). On the basis of the findings, it was recommended among others, that individuals, groups, civil societies and the government should continue to sensitize the public on the dangers of all anti-social behaviours through social networking sites to help reduce their rate of involvement. Further studies was also recommended to explore the influence of social networking on a non-student adolescent population or out of school adolescents.

Keywords: Social, Networking, adolescents, behavior, problems, cultism.

INTRODUCTION

The world today has been described as a global village largely because people around the world are rapidly integrating virtual forms of communication in everyday lives. The 21st century has experienced a rise in cyber operations and with the fast development and incorporation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into every facet of life, life has changed radically for many. The Internet being the most popular of the ICT's has facilitated new forms of social interaction owing to its widespread usability and access; and has even been made far more accessible by mobile phones (Ufuophu & Agobami, 2012; Idakwo, 2011).

The interactive nature of online environments has expanded with social networks and this dominates all forms of communication over the internet. Through social networking, people can use networks of online friends and group memberships to keep in touch with current friends, reconnect with old friends or create real life friendships through similar interests or groups. Besides establishing important social relationships, social networking members can share interests with other like-minded members by joining groups and forums (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012; Eke, et al., 2014; Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010).

Adolescents also known as teenagers are people in the period of adolescence. This period begins approximately 10 to 13 years and ends between the ages of 18 to 22 (Santrock, 2012). It is a period of experimentation which may lead many adolescents to involve in risky and anti-social behaviours if not well supervised. The social networking sites have become a raging craze nowadays, and an integral part of the daily life of adolescents. Participation in online social networking sites has skyrocketed in recent years and created a new environment in which adolescents and young adults may be exposed to and influenced by behaviour-related problems as manifested in several disorderly behaviours such as drug abuse, cultism, sexual harassment, rebellion among others (Muia, 2016) giving rise to high rate of criminal activities which could endanger the lives of individuals and families; and may also hinder development and foreign investment in Nigeria (Nche, 2012). This would naturally become a source of concern in Akwa Ibom State.

Adolescents' behavioural problems have been defined as any act that violates social rules and the basic rights of others. These behaviours are considered to be abnormal if it is uncommon or different from the norm and does not conform to what society expects (Thio et al., 2012). For instance, Titus-Ernstoff *et al.* (2008) and Moreno *et al.* (2010) in their study revealed that a relationship exists between social networking and adolescents' substance use. Tyler (2008) also reported that social networks may influence individual substance use behaviour via the prevalence of substance use within the network, as well as the interpersonal dynamics among the networking members.

Drug abuse is a rapidly growing global problem. It places a significant threat to the social, health, and economic fabrics of the families and society (Giade, 2011). The majority of the Nigerian adolescents ignorantly depend on one form of drug or the other for their various daily activities—social, educational and political, among others. Such drugs include: Tobacco, Indian hemp, cocaine, morphine, Heroine, Alcohol, ephedrine, Madras, Caffeine, Glue, Barbiturates, and Amphetamines. Some of these teenagers use drugs for many reasons, including curiosity and desire to find out the effectiveness of a particular drug, to feel good, to reduce stress, or to feel grown up (Ajibulu, 2011; Oshodi *et al.*, 2010; Oluremi, 2012).

Adolescents may be exposed to and display pro-drugs messages and images in different sites through online portrayals of drinking or smoking on personal pages as well as unregulated drug marketing on social networking sites that may reach underage people (Mundt et al., 2012; Titus-Ernstoff, et al., 2008). They may indulge in drugs because they watch best actors using drugs on movies, watch cult related videos online and other related vices (Akinyinde, 2011).

Moreover, adolescents may be overt, involving aggressive actions against siblings, peers, parents, teachers, or other adults, such as verbal abuse, bullying and hitting; or covert, involving aggressive

actions against property, such as theft and vandalism (Lopes, 2005). Bullying and hostility among adolescents is a long-standing and pervasive social issue. In recent years, research has revealed that one in three teens experience some form of cyber-bullying, often resulting in embarrassment, emotional distress, psychosocial trauma, decreased self-esteem and even suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Because the Internet allows teens to remain anonymous on websites or create false profiles, cyber-bullying has become a serious issue (Meschi, 2009).

The Internet has played a significant role in the activities of cult groups. In those days, information about the various groups was often based on stories retold. This is often subject to exaggerations and distortion of facts. Akinyinde (2011) stated that through the Internet, information concerning the history and principles of most cult groups can be downloaded and read. The would-be cultist will be adequately informed about the philosophy of the group before joining. There is also the room to compare and make decision on the cult group to belong. This information on the website of the cult group is open to all unlike before when students or would-be members merely speculate.

There appear to be a paucity of literature on the involvement of adolescents in social networking and the influence of such involvement on adolescents' behaviour problems in Akwa Ibom State, hence the need for the study.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to investigate the influence of social networking on adolescents' behavioural problems in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study:

1. Determined adolescents' extent of involvement in social networking
2. Determined the influence of adolescents' involvement in social networking on drug abuse
3. Determined the influence of adolescents' involvement in social networking on bullying tendency
4. Determined the influence of adolescents' involvement in social networking on involvement in cult activities

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of involvement adolescents in social networking?
2. Does involvement in social networking contribute to drug abuse among adolescents in Uyo local Government area of Akwa Ibom State?
3. Does involvement in social networking contribute to bullying tendency among adolescents in Uyo local Government area of Akwa Ibom State?
4. Does involvement in social networking contribute cultism among adolescents in Uyo local Government area of Akwa Ibom State?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design for the study was descriptive survey research. Descriptive survey research design involves a complete analysis of all salient variables among the subjects being studied for the purpose of aptly describing what exists within the scope of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015); hence, it was most appropriate for the study.

Area of the study

The study was conducted in Uyo Local Government Area. Uyo is the capital city of Akwa Ibom state located in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria, and also doubles a Local Government Area. The area is made up of four traditional clans. The choice of the study area was due to the high population of schools and adolescents in the area as well as the increasing anti-social behaviours among adolescents in the area.

Population for the study

The population comprised students from Senior Secondary (SS) classes in the 14 public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area put at 14,739.

Sample for the study

Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 601 respondents for the study. The first stage involved purposive selection of four out of the 14 public secondary schools, one from each of the four clans in the local government area for equal representation. The second stage was the stratified random selection of all students from senior classes in the four selected schools giving a total of 6,010. The last stage was a random selection of 601(10%) which served as the study sample.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire entitled "Social Networking and Adolescents' Behavioural Problems Questionnaire" (SNABPQ). The instrument was divided into two major sections: Sections A and B. Section A sought information on the personal data of the respondents and had 5 items, while Section B reflected the specific objectives of the study and had 35 items structured in a five-point rating scale.

Data collection methods

The instrument was administered on the students in their classrooms with the assistance of the school counsellors and teachers after permission had been sought and obtained from the Principals of the respective schools.

Data analysis

Data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using means, ranks and simple regression analysis.

RESULTS

The Extent of Involvement of Adolescents in Social Networking

Table 1: Item analysis of extent of involvement in social networking sites by the respondents

Social Networking sites	Daily	Once weekly	Rarely	Not used at all	Not aware of	Mean	Rank
Facebook	165*(27.5)**	112*(18.6)**	68*(113)**	166*(27.6)**	90*(15.0)**	3.16	1
Snapchat	15(2.5)	19(3.2)	32(5.3)	263(43.8)	272(45.3)	1.74	6
Twitter	15(2.5)	25(4.2)	48(8.0)	266(44.3)	247(41.1)	1.84	4
Google+	17(2.8)	24(4.0)	29(4.8)	282(46.9)	249(41.4)	1.80	5
WhatsApp	79(13.1)	57(9.3)	53(8.8)	199(33.1)	213(35.4)	2.32	2
YouTube	41(6.8)	43(7.2)	49(8.2)	246(40.9)	222(36.9)	2.06	3

* and ** = frequency and percentage respectively

Table 1 shows extent of involvement of adolescents in social networking. This indicates that Facebook had the highest mean score of 3.16 and was ranked first, followed by WhatsApp with the mean response of 2.32 ranked, and YouTube, Twitter, Google +, Snapchat with means of 2.06, 1.84, 1.80 and 1.74 respectively.

Influence of Adolescents' Involvement in Social Networking on Drug Abuse

Table 2: Regression analysis of the influence of adolescents' extent of involvement in social networking and drug abuse

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	T-value
Extent of involvement	-0.263	0.077	-3.393***
Constant	25.203	0.644	39.134
R ²	0.619		
F	11.513		

*** = significant at 5% level; P<0.05, Dependent Variable= drug abuse.

Result in Table 2 gives -0.263 as the coefficient of the regression parameter (extent of involvement in social networking) with t-calculated = -3.393 and P<.05. The regression coefficient of -0.263 implies that a unit increase in the extent of involvement in social networking will reduce the level of drug abuse among adolescents by -0.263 unit.

Influence of Adolescents' Involvement in Social Networking on Bullying Tendency

Table 3: Regression analysis of the influence of adolescents' extent of involvement in social networking and bullying tendency

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value
Extent of involvement	-0.056	0.049	-1.134
Constant	15.612	0.412	37.924
R ²	0.032		
F	1.287		

Dependent Variable: Bullying Tendency, P>0.05.

Table 3 shows the coefficient of regression parameters to be -0.056 and 15.612 respectively for the extent of involvement in social networking and constant with calculated value of -1.134 and P>0.05. This means that involvement in social networking does not contribute to bullying tendency among adolescents in Uyo local Government area of Akwa Ibom State.

Influence of Adolescents' Involvement in Social Networking on Cultism

Table 4: Regression analysis of influence of adolescents' extent of involvement in social networking on cultism

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value
Extent of involvement	-0.213	0.051	-4.185***
Constant	16.313	0.423	38.598
R ²	0.728		
F	17.515		

*** = significant at 5% level; P<0.05, Dependent Variable= Cultism.

The result in Table 4 shows that the regression coefficient of the extent of involvement in social networking was -0.213 with t-calculated value = -4.185 and $P < 0.05$. This implies that a unit increase in the extent of involvement in social networking will reduce the level of involvement in cultism among adolescents by 0.213 unit.

DISCUSSION

The finding of the study revealed that Facebook was the most frequently used social networking site among the various others being used by adolescents. This could be as a result of the fact that Facebook could be accessed using any phone that has a browser unlike WhatsApp and some other applications that require, Windows, Android, Apple and other applications to access them. Finding agrees with the report of Idakwo (2011) that Facebook has the highest number of users compared to other social networking sites. The result is also in line with the findings of Eke *et al.* (2014) that a lot of people make use of Facebook because it accommodates people of all interests and backgrounds and members often include their interest so as to locate other members with similar interests by searching for key words. This goes to show that adolescent often search for media that will meet their immediate needs, enhance knowledge and social interactions. These are attributes more common in Facebook when compared to other social networking sites.

Result revealed that involvement of the respondents in social networking had a positive significant influence on drug abuse. This implies that the more time spent by adolescents on social networking, the less their involvement in the use of drugs. The finding could be as a result of the awareness created on the dangers of drug abuse by government, individuals and civil societies using various networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., which the adolescents are using on daily basis. The finding is in agreement with the study by Titus-Ernstoff *et al.* (2008) which revealed that a relationship exists between social networking and adolescents' substance use. Although the present study and the one cited above reported an association between drug abuse and social networking involvement, the present study revealed a negative association between adolescent involvement in social networking and drug abuse, while the previous reported positive association between drug abuse and adolescents' involvement in social networking. This suggests that heavy consumption of media content has a significant effect on the perception of users as well as their attitude and practice. The findings of this study however is at variance with Tyler (2008) who reported that social networks may influence individual substance use behaviour via the prevalence of substance use within the network as well as the interpersonal dynamics among the networking members. The findings equally disagree with Moreno *et al.* (2010) which stated that the displayed alcohol references on social networking sites may include information and images pertaining to alcohol that may influence viewers and be indicative of offline use. The differences in the findings of this study and the previous studies could be due to the different environments in which the researches were carried out; and the increased use of different social networking sites by health personnel to create awareness on the dangers of drug abuse within the period between the two studies.

Results also revealed that there was no significant influence of adolescents' extent of involvement in social networking on bullying tendency. This implies that social networking does not necessarily influence offline bullying tendencies among adolescents. Bullying tendencies among adolescents could stem from their attachment to watching of wrestling and other violent scenes, which they may practice at home and school, leading to bullying of peers and even siblings. The finding is in support of the study Lopes (2005) which revealed that the major causes of bullying tendencies exhibited by

adolescents was the physical environment and drug use and not necessarily social media. The argument may be that a child who grows up in a violent environment or home is likely to exhibit such behaviour in school. However, cyber bullying rather than physical bullying may be found to be associated with social networking (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013).

Results also revealed a positive significant influence of adolescents' extent of involvement in social networking on cultism in the study area. This means that adolescents' exposure to social media has a positive rather than a negative influence and is capable of discouraging them from taking part in cult activities. This could be as a result of the incessant cult clashes and dead bodies of suspected cultists being circulated online and warnings by security agencies on the impending doom of anyone found to be involved in cultism. The finding is in agreement with the view of Akinyinde (2011) who asserted that through the Internet, information concerning the history and principles of most cult groups can be downloaded and read. As such people have the option of joining or not after reading information about them, unlike before the advent of social network where people used to join different groups blindly without knowing the secret behind such groups. It is common to see on social networking sites the pictures and names of higher institutions students expelled from schools for involvement in cult activities. This could discourage secondary school students from having the ambition of going to higher institution from getting involved in cultism.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that adolescents make use of Facebook more than any other social networking site and that involvement in social networking influence in-school adolescents positively rather than negatively in drug abuse and cultism contrary to expectation. However, the study did not establish an association between involvement in social networking and bullying tendencies by adolescents in the area. Bullying tendencies among students could arise from watching violence from other media sources such as television and movies; and most importantly from the current violent nature of the Nigerian society.

Recommendations

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

1. Since involvement in social networking had a positive impact on drug abuse and cultism, a lot more should be done by individuals, groups, civil societies and the government to continue sensitizing the public on the dangers of all anti-social behaviours through social networking sites.
2. Bullying tendencies of adolescents was not found to be related to involvement in social networking, as such, parents and other adults should teach young people peaceful conflict resolution instead of resorting to violence. Moreover, parents should monitor the kind of movies watched by children from early age and the kind the computer games they play so as to prevent them from practicing violence scenes as adolescents, which may play out in the form of bullying.
3. Further study is recommended to explore the influence of social networking on a non-student adolescent population or out of school adolescents.

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