

"Trends in Social Media Usage and Adolescent socialization in a Public Senior Secondary School in Abuja, Nigeria"

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Abstract

This study investigates social media usage trends and prevalence among 260 adolescents in a public senior secondary school in Abuja, Nigeria. A cross-sectional study design was employed, with students aged 13 to 18 years. Data collected revealed that a significant majority of respondents, 63.1%, possess a smartphone and indicate a high level of access to social media platforms. Their engagement with social media daily is primarily for social interaction, social comparison, entertainment, and academic support. Furthermore, the findings highlight patterns of usage that varies by gender, with female students displaying a higher, 60% tendency for interaction through visual content platforms, while male students favored gaming and sports-related content. The study also identifies potential concerns regarding the implications of excessive social media use, including mental health issues, cyberbullying, and academic performance. These results underscore the need for targeted educational programs and parental guidance

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to promote safe and responsible social media engagement. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of adolescents' social media behaviors and offers recommendations for fostering a balanced approach to digital engagement in educational settings.

Key words : Adolescents, Social Media, Mental Health, Engagement, Trends.

Introduction

Social media has become an essential aspect of adolescent life, serving as a dynamic platform for communication, self-expression, and identity formation. In Nigeria, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are particularly prevalent among teenagers, shaping their social interactions and self-perception. Understanding the extent of social media use in this demographic setting is vital for evaluating its impact on mental health, as excessive engagement has been linked to various psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem [15] , [16].

Today's adolescents are deeply engrossed in social media, which has emerged as a primary mode of communication. This engagement plays a significant role in their cognitive and emotional development. While social media provides opportunities for young people in Nigeria to connect, share experiences, and stay informed about trends, it is also associated with several negative mental health outcomes (Agbo, 2021). Research indicates that increased social media use among adolescents correlates with heightened issues such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and low self-esteem [3].

Numerous studies have highlighted the direct effects of social media on the psychological well-being of Nigerian adolescents. Evidence suggests that unrestricted social media use is linked to an escalation in mental health problems, with cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content exacerbating these issues. Furthermore, the addictive nature of these platforms negatively impacts academic performance among Nigerian youth [3], [11]

As adolescents in senior secondary school increasingly engage with social media, there is an urgent need to address the concerns surrounding its effects on mental health. Research indicates that this age group is more likely to experience adverse outcomes such as depression and anxiety due to factors like cyberbullying and addictive use patterns (Hasyim & Cuzzamu, 2022).

To mitigate these detrimental effects, it is essential for parents and educators in Nigeria to actively monitor and regulate social media usage among teenagers. Proactive measures, including use of guidelines and

restrictions, can have a positive impact on the mental health of adolescents. Studies have shown that controlled social media usage can alleviate some negative mental health outcomes in this age group [19].

Trends in Social Media Usage:

According to studies, platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook are particularly popular among adolescents. The global youth population's engagement with social media often surpasses multiple hours a day, leading to both positive and negative outcomes. With the rapid proliferation of social media platforms, understanding their impact on young people's lives has become increasingly imperative. Recognizing that adolescents are among the most active users of social media, this article presents empirical data regarding the frequency and nature of their online interactions. Research into the prevalence of social media usage among adolescents provides insights for educators, parents, and mental health professionals. Understanding usage patterns and trends can aid in developing interventions aimed at promoting healthier online behaviors [11], [20].

Potential Effects of High Usage:

Frequent social media usage can influence various aspects of an adolescent's life, including:

- Academic Performance: Excessive use can negatively impact study time and reduce academic performance [10].
- Sleep Patterns: Increased screen time, especially before bed, is linked to poorer sleep hygiene and quality [8], [12].
- Social Interactions: While social media can enhance communication skills, it might simultaneously lead to diminished face-to-face interactions [20].

In summary, this research underscores the significant negative consequences of social media on the mental health of adolescents in senior secondary schools in Nigeria. It is crucial for parents and educators to be aware of these impacts and take proactive steps to protect and support the mental well-being of young people .

Aim and Specific Objectives

Aim:

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the trends of social media use and its effects on the mental health of adolescents at Government Senior Secondary School, Phase III, Kubwa, FCT Abuja.

Specific Objectives:

1. To assess the prevalence of social media usage among the adolescent respondents.

2. To identify specific patterns and types of social media engagement that may influence mental health outcomes.
3. To evaluate the overall mental health outcomes associated with social media usage in this adolescent population.

Materials and Methods:

A survey was administered to 260 adolescents sampled from a total number of 740 senior students class in Government Senior Secondary School III, Kubwa, FCT Abuja, 2024.

Taro Yamane formula was used to calculate the sample size as follows;
$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$
 Where N is the population size (740) ϵ is the margin of error (0.05) . $n = 740 \div 1 + 740(0.05)^2$.

$n = 256.65$ rounded up to the nearest whole number, the sample size n is approximately 260 students. The students were randomly selected by systematic random sampling until the sample size was achieved. A validated structured self-administered questionnaires were distributed to eligible respondents to fill and returned for quantitative data extraction on social media usage patterns, the type of content consumed, and self-reported mental health indicators. This study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and the well-being of participants. Approvals were sought from the schools administrative board.

Results:

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=260)

Variables	Frequency (%)
Age groups	
≤ 15	79 (30.4)
16 – 18	148 (56.9)
> 18	33 (12.7)
Mean ± SD	16 ±2.1
Range	14 – 23
Gender	
Male	104 (40.0)

Female	156 (60.0)
Type of family setting of Birth	
Monogamous	219 (84.2)
Polygamous	41 (15.8)
Employment status of father	
Employed	245 (94.2)
Unemployed	15 (5.8)
Level of education of father	
Primary	55 (21.1)
Secondary	67 (25.8)
Tertiary	110 (42.3)
No formal education	28 (10.8)

More than half of the respondents (56.9%) were between the ages 16-18 years old, 30.4% and 12.7% were less than 15 years and greater than 18 years respectively with a mean age of 16 ± 2.1 years old. Most of the respondents (60.0%) were females and 40.0% were males. Majority of the respondents (84.2%) came from monogamous family setting while 15.8% were from polygamous type. On the employment status of the father, 94.2% of the respondents noted that their father is employed while 5.8% were unemployed. About 42.3% of the respondents father have tertiary education as their highest qualification, 25.8% and 21.1% had secondary and primary education respectively while 10.8% had no formal education.

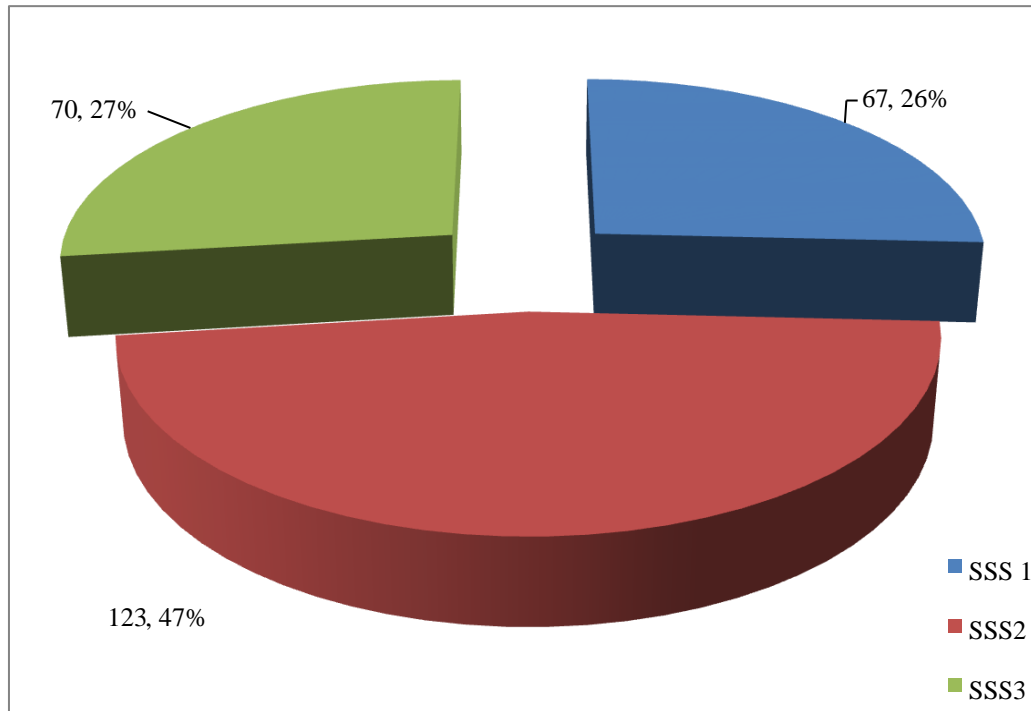


Figure 1: Presentation of respondents by class

About 47.0% of the respondents were in SSS 2, 27.0% and 26.0% were in SSS3 and SSS1 respectively.

Table 2: Possession of smart phones and sources

Variables	Frequency (%)
Got a smart phone	
Yes	164 (63.1)
No	96 (36.9)
Sources of phones	n=96
Parents	44 (45.8)

Family members	16 (16.7)
Friends	36 (37.5)

Most of the respondents (63.1%) had smart phones with parent (45.8%) and friends (37.5%) being the major source of the phones.

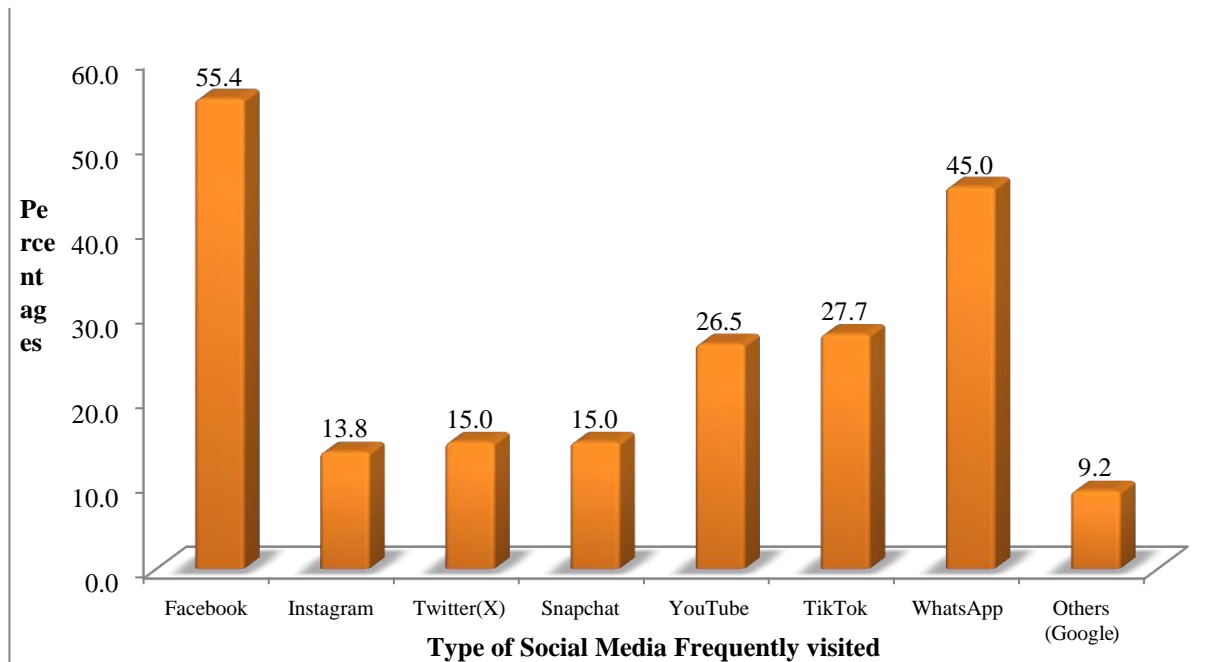


Figure 2: Most frequently visited social media handle

On the most frequently visited social media handle, 55.4% and 45.0% of the respondents utilized Facebook and WhatsApp respectively. Also, 27.7% and 26.5% of the respondents they used TiktTok and YouTube frequently respectively.

Table 3: Impact of social media on overall mental health of the adolescents

Variables	Frequency (%)
Social media use has a positive or negative impact on your overall mental health	
Positive	44 (16.9)

Negative	58 (22.3)
Neutral	158 (60.8)
Impacts of social media on mental health	
Beautiful	43 (16.5)
Celebrity life style	46 (17.7)
Motivational	71 (27.3)
Listen to Motivational videos	11 (4.2)
Facebook views	52 (20.0)
Eye problem	9 (3.5)
Tiktok	6 (2.3)
Instagram influencers	22 (8.5)
Other uses of social media	
To relief pain	36 (13.8)
It helps in learning	150 (57.7)
It makes me feel good	55 (21.2)
It affects me positively as i do not feel oppressed easily	19 (7.3)

Most of the respondents (60.8%) were neutral on the impact of social media on their mental health, 16.9% and 22.3% claimed that social media had positive and negative impact on their overall mental health status respectively. More than half of the respondents (57.7%) noted that social media help them in learning, 21.2% and 13.8% noted that it make them feel good and relief pain respectively. The results indicate a high prevalence of social media usage among the students surveyed.

Key findings include:

Daily Engagement: A significant majority of students reported engaging with social media daily.

- Platform Popularity: Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as the most popular platforms, followed by Tik Tok. This high level of engagement raises concerns about excessive use, which may lead to negative mental health outcomes.

Discussion:

The findings in this study suggest that social media serves as a vital communication tool for many adolescents, its excessive use warrant further investigation into potential impacts on mental health. There was a profound influence of social media on adolescents, predominantly aged 16-18 years and a notable gender disparity (60% females, 40% males). The age group aligns with global trends showing that teens frequently engage with social media to maintain connections with peers and family. The acknowledgement of adolescents being particularly vulnerable to the impacts of social media, especially females, resonates with findings from global studies, such as those cited by Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian (2017), which indicate heightened rates of anxiety and depression among young girls. Also, the notable gender disparity reported (60% females, 40% males) reflects a common theme in various studies that show females often bear a heavier psychological burden from social media interactions, particularly due to factors like social comparison and cyberbullying. The study further notes that a significant majority of respondents (84.2%) came from monogamous families, which may foster more consistent parental monitoring and engagement, potentially mitigating some of the negative effects of social media.

The data reveals a high employment rate among fathers (94.2%) and a substantial portion with tertiary education (42.3%), indicating a relatively stable economic background and suggesting better access to technology and digital literacy. The prevalence of smartphone ownership among respondents (63.1%) aligns with global trends, providing constant access to social media, which can lead to increased issues of academic distractions, anxiety, depression, and negative experiences such as cyberbullying [4] , [16]. Approximately 17.3% of respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying, which is linked to severe mental health repercussions.

The study brought to bear a relationship between social media engagement and social comparison, noting that while a majority (45.2%) do not frequently compare themselves to others online, a significant minority is at risk of feelings of inadequacy and lowered self-worth, contributing to mental health challenges (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; [18] Predominantly used platforms include Facebook (55.4%) and WhatsApp (45.0%), with social media primarily utilized for connecting with friends and family. While these connections can enhance social support, excessive reliance on digital communication may foster loneliness and isolation [7] ; T wenge & Campbell, 2018; [9].

The role of entertainment on platforms like TikTok and YouTube is also significant, with 39.2% of respondents using social media for entertainment. Although entertainment can alleviate stress, its excessive use is linked to various negative outcomes, such as addiction and disrupted sleep patterns. Overall, the interplay between social media use, potential negative interactions (like cyberbullying), and social comparison illustrates the complex impact of digital engagement on adolescent mental health, underscoring the need for mindful usage and parental guidance. The correlation between high social media usage and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression has been documented in various studies [1] , [16]. Understanding these patterns sets the stage for evaluating associated risks and developing interventions aimed at promoting healthier online behaviors.

Implications for Future Research

1. Longitudinal Studies: Should determine the correlation between high social media usage and mental health issues such as anxiety, poor performances and depression. This proposed research could track changes in social media usage and mental health over time.
2. Intervention Programs: Schools may consider implementing social media literacy programs that educate students about healthy usage patterns and the potential risks associated with excessive engagement.

Conclusion

The study highlights the significant prevalence of social media use among adolescents in public secondary schools in Nigeria, with a prevalence rate of 63.1%. As social media continues to shape the social landscape, understanding its impact on mental health is essential for educators, parents, and mental health professionals. Future research and interventions should emphasize promoting balanced usage and mitigating risks associated with excessive engagement.

Ongoing exploration of trends in social media use among adolescents is vital to identifying potential risks to their mental health and well-being. This information can inform preventive measures and support systems within educational environments. Expanding research in this field is essential for comprehensively understanding the implications of social media on adolescent development and wellness. The findings underscore the complex relationship between adolescent social media use and mental health, highlighting both the benefits and potential risks. While social media platforms serve as crucial tools for communication and connection, they also expose adolescents to challenges such as cyberbullying, social

comparison, poor school performances and increased anxiety and depression. The study reveals that family dynamics, parental involvement, and economic stability significantly shape adolescents' experiences with social media. Given that a substantial percentage of this demographic cohort experiences adverse effects, it is imperative to address these issues through informed strategies and interventions.

Recommendations

1. **Parental Guidance and Monitoring:** Parents should be encouraged to engage in their children's online activities actively. This includes setting boundaries around social media use and initiating open discussions about the potential risks of social media, such as cyberbully and social comparison. Parental involvement can help foster an environment of trust and support.
2. **Promoting Digital Literacy:** Schools and community organizations should implement programs that educate adolescents about responsible social media use, digital literacy, and critical evaluation of online content. Teaching students how to navigate social media safely can empower them to make informed choices.
3. **Encouraging Healthy Social Connections:** Encourage adolescents to balance their online interactions with face-to-face connections to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. Schools can facilitate social activities that promote in-person communication and community-building.
4. **Implementing Cyberbully Prevention Programs:** Educational institutions should establish comprehensive anti-cyberbully policies and programs. Collaborating with students to raise awareness about the impacts of cyberbully can help create a supportive school culture.
5. **Encouraging Mindful Usage of Technology:** Programs that promote mindfulness and healthy screen-time habits should be introduced. Adolescents should learn to recognize the signs of excessive social media use and be encouraged to engage in offline activities such as sports, hobbies, or volunteering.
6. **Access to Mental Health Resources:** Schools and communities should ensure that mental health resources are readily accessible to adolescents. This includes counseling services where students can discuss their experiences and feelings regarding social media use.

By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to mitigate the negative effects of social media while enhancing its positive contributions to adolescent social connectivity and emotional well-being.

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