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Impact of Adolescents' Exposure to Social Media on their Mental Health

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Research Article

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects of teenage social media use on mental health and the ways in which media education can help adolescents' minds return to normal. The study included an overview of the study's background, a discussion of its foundational ideas, its theoretical framework, and an empirical review. It implored a combined quantitative and survey research design, with the population drawn from the age-class of adolescents and teens, that constitute the bulk of social media users. The sample size consists of two-hundred (200) teenagers from the Abraka urban and neighborhood. The study revealed that, cyber bullying, depression, sexing and loneliness were some of the challenges adolescents faced when exposed to the social media. It revealed also that, family crisis, low-self-esteem; deadly diseases and academic decline are effects of adolescent's mental health when exposed to the numerous positive impacts of social media to society. It also has some detrimental effects on adolescents who are exposed to it.

Keywords: Adolescents, invigorate, media education, mental health, social media

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, communication has advanced significantly and transcended national boundaries due to advancements in media. The revolution in information and communication technology (ICT) has led to a breakthrough in communication and information transmission that is being felt more widely in the globe today. One of the greatest communication scholars of all time, Marshall McLuhan, prophesied in 1968 that there would come a time when communication would be limitless and the world would become a global village. This is why the emergence of information and communication technology supports his prediction. We live in a time of globalization, a phrase used to characterize the increasing interconnectedness of nations and people worldwide (Awake, 2000). Over the past several decades, information and communication technology has truly transformed the communication landscape by facilitating quicker and simpler communication while also transforming the nature of communication through the emergence of new media technologies. Several cutting-edge technologies have revolutionized and refined worldwide communication, such as the internet, GSM, global system mobile, dual, compact disk, computer, video networking, electronic mail, fax, Telex, and so on. Information technology has revolutionized communication through the use of the aforementioned media technologies as well as the introduction of a completely new medium that is distinct from the conventional media of radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and books. This medium of communication is the "social media".

According to Dewing (2010), social media refers to the vast array of internet-based and mobile services that enable consumers to engage in online communication. He goes on to say that social media may have an impact on how people engage online and can create new

avenues for conversation and cooperation. The development of every field of human endeavor, including politics, agriculture, science, medicine, commerce and trade, banking, transportation, education, administration, journalism, and most importantly, health, has been greatly aided by social media, one of the recently revolutionized forms of communication. Similar to other conventional mass media like radio, television, and newspapers, social media has become an effective instrument for health communication and awareness campaigns. Social media has led the way in health communication campaigns throughout the years. This might be attributed to the fact that human health is an essential quality that cannot be overstated. Social media has been recognized for its ability to spread health information, monitor the environment for health, spread health innovation, communicate health breakthroughs, analyze scientific medical research, and much more.

Socioeconomic media, an explosion of information and communication technology, is used by people from all socioeconomic classes; adolescents, adults, children, and teens with varying degrees of exposure. In addition to the enormous good effects that social media has on society, its use and exposure can also have some detrimental effects. There are two ways to look at the effects of social media use and exposure: the good effects, which might be emotional, psychological, social, or even mental. Without a question, the record for social media exposure and usage is greatest among teenagers. Guunita and John (2018) report that the number of adolescents has increased dramatically. On the other side, media education involves producing and creating media material in addition to helping people develop their analytical and critical thinking abilities (Hobb, 2017). It may also be used to analyze the communication system provided by the media, which includes the

social, cultural, and political environment in which it functions (Share & Keller, 2005). Many arguments have been sparked by social media, the various degrees to which young people are exposed to it, and the consequent effects on their mental health that have been suggested previously. These discussions have gained relevance since they primarily address the health issues of the youth demographic, which makes up a bigger portion of the population in society, as well as the threshold for national development. Manktelow and Taylor (2014) state that there are heated discussions and disagreements on how social media platforms used online affect young people's mental health.

Adolescents have been exposed to the world of social media more and more throughout the decades due to the rise of information and communication technology, of which social media is an offspring. This has been closely associated with the mental health of adolescents in recent times. Due to their constant use of and exposure to social media, today's teenagers are more vulnerable in terms of their health, which has sparked discussion. Among these mental health issues include poor self-esteem, anxiety, and sadness. Even if the amount of study on conversation has increased, there is still a certain amount of information that has to be filled in. The health risks associated with teenage use of social media, the kinds of social media sites to which teenagers are exposed, the impact of these issues on teenagers, and the variables influencing teenagers' use of social media. It has been suggested that media education is a powerful tool for thwarting this threat. But its efficacy turns out to be questionable. This backdrop serves as its foundation. The objectives of the study are to: find out the types of social media platforms adolescents are exposed to; examine the mental health challenges the social media exposed adolescents to; find out the effects of the social media exposure on

adolescents mental health; and explore the role of media education in curbing the negative effects of social media on adolescents mental health.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Teenage Exposure to Social Media

Social media is typically used to refer to large-scale collaborative media creation and sharing (Boyd and Ellison 2008). The idea that today's youth are active producers and consumers of media has arisen from the fact that they are consuming, creating, sharing, and remixing media (Brune, 2008). According to Dewing (2010), social media allows users to submit their opinions on blogs, engage in online debates, share news articles, and swap images and videos. Horizons (2009) asserts in this vein of reasoning that while individuals have been using the internet to communicate with one another since the early 1980s, social media networking services have only become widely used and more prevalent in recent decades.

According to Boyd & Ellison (2007), social networking services are web-based tools that let users create semi-public profiles on a restricted system and list other users they are connected to. Since the launch of social media networks like Facebook, MySpace, and CywardBebo, they claim to have drawn millions of users, many of whom have incorporated these sites into their daily routines. As previously hypothesized, social media exposure and usage span all societal strata. The teenage user base is the largest of these strata. Adolescence, as defined by Jude and Orhewere (2009), is a stage of life in which a young person is neither seen as a kid nor as an adult. It is a difficult time in a person's life because adolescents, who are frequently inexperienced, frequently experiment with dangerous conducts, frequently with little or no knowledge of the danger. According to (Koblwe & O'Bannon, 2009),

teenagers live in a new kind of curious and exploratory environment. The emergence of young culture is accelerated by the information age.

Social Media Exposure and Adolescent Mental Health Challenges

One of the most important and vital aspects of a person's life is their health. It is a crucial component that is always necessary to stress. Psychological, emotional, physical, physiological, and mental aspects all make up human health. That being said, health is defined by the World Health Organization (1993:5) as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." One of the most important aspects of human nature that shouldn't be compromised is mental wellness. But in third-world countries like Nigeria, the emphasis is more on the social and physical aspects of health than the mental. Ashong and Herbert (2007) provide a good example of this when they say that people are led to believe that the mental components of well-being are secondary to the physical and social parts. This is seen in the amount of money allocated to mental health care, the dearth of facilities providing mental health treatment and training, the shortage of mental health professionals, the misperception of health issues, and the negative stigma attached to mental illness and those who care for it.

According to Ewhrudjakpor (2008), mental illness is defined as a psychological or physiological pattern that manifests in an individual and is typically linked to suffering or incapacity that is not anticipated as a normal aspect of culture, religion, or growth. It could also refer to a complete mental deviance from what is considered normal or appropriate. It is the total loss of human reason. One of the worst conditions that may afflict a man is mental sickness or challenge, which has no boundaries. Every level of human

civilization is impacted, starting with childhood and continuing through adolescence and adulthood. A variety of factors can be linked to mental illness, such as drug and alcohol abuse, physical and sexual abuse, hereditary traits, excessive use of social media, and other factors brought on by the development of information and communication technology and globalization. Teenagers' exposure to social media caused them to experience mental health issues. Teenagers, who use social media extensively, are more likely to experience the following mental health issues:

- i. **Depression:** This is emotional disturbance that develop when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites.
- ii. **Sexing:** This is the act of sending another person or group sexually explicit texts or images of oneself that show off one's sexuality as teens. According to a nationwide poll conducted by the National Campaign to Support Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 20% of teenagers engage in sexual activity, with adolescent guys often resorting to sending suggestive or explicit communications. Teenage females, on the other hand, are more prone to email offensive pictures of themselves.
- iii. **Cyber bullying:** The American Psychological Association (APA), in accordance with Ramasubbu (2016), defines bullying as aggressive conduct by one person that creates discomfort for another. Cyber bullying encompasses a variety of actions, including nasty emails, outright threats, and anonymous activities. Furthermore, Izuogu (2007)

notes that among young people in the third world who may be impacted by their exposure to western media, media globalization may promote negative values including gangsterism, pornography, drug addiction, rape, and semi-nudity. Other issues include pedophilia, open homosexuality, independence, and the effects of teenage social media use.

Types of Social Media Platforms Adolescents are exposed to

Teenagers have shown to be the most frequent consumers of social media across all demographic groups. According to Ahn (2011), kids, adolescents, and teens are among those whose engagement cannot truly be overstated. The majority of social network site users are teenagers (SNS). Her findings indicate that teens use social media for everyday interaction in emerging research. The contemporary youth and electronic media have a mutually beneficial connection, with the media relying on the youth market for financial stability and the youth needing the media for knowledge. A few social networking sites have made an appearance. According to O'Reilly (2007), Facebook and Myspace are two oddly named platforms that are being used by teenagers for communication.

Additionally, there is the blog, which is a website with frequent postings of content. Early in the twenty-first century, blogging swiftly became a common form of communication, according to Gbenga (2006). According to Ellison and Boyd, Facebook is another popular social media platform that teenagers use extensively. It's a less restrictive network when it comes to membership, sharing of personal information, and interacting. The thing that makes Facebook so special is that users

cannot share their whole profile with other people. Other social media networks include Myspace, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Less than ten years later, millions of individuals worldwide of all ages have signed up, according to Bernoff (2010) social media platforms (SNS).

Effects of Social Media Exposure on Adolescents Mental Health

Teenage use of social media has undoubtedly had a negative influence on adolescents' personal lives as well as the families and larger society. Like other media, social media is constantly flooded with messages that depict sexual impropriety. Music videos, home videos, and dramas teach young people that being irresponsible is the fastest path to wealth, much like certain advertisements encourage underage sex and condom use. (Obawo & Koblowe, 2018).

According to Jude and John (2009), there is an alternative perspective that suggests teenage exposure to social media increases the risk of adolescents developing life-threatening sexually transmitted infections like HIV/AIDS. This can happen if they have had risky, unprotected intercourse with someone who are carriers of these fatal diseases, whom they have connected with and interacted with on social media. This might worsen and lead to despair and alone. Additionally, teenagers who are exposed to social media may experience psychological, emotional, illogical, and deviant behavioral changes that defy society's accepted standards and values.

Without a doubt, teenagers' media health has suffered greatly as a result of their exposure to social media. Stealing, prostitution, juvenile unruliness, rape, intoxication, lawlessness, unchaste acts, murder, and other vices have become the norm, and society is totally out of control in this area. Others' bodily pleasure and self-esteem are declining. lower academic performance and attention span (Hinkley

& Tylor, 2012).decreased interpersonal skills in person and increased social isolation (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010) as well as a detrimental effect on one's sense of self (Turkle, 2015).

Media Education, sometimes known as media literacy is undoubtedly a distinct facet of communication which cannot be concealed. The process by which people acquire media literacy and the ability to comprehend the nature, methods, and significance of media messages and products is known as media education. Therefore, in Livingstone's (2018) opinion, it is crucial that people are aware of how they are controlled, when the media can be trusted, what political or economic interests are involved, and how to distinguish between what is true and false. Media education teaches youth how to manage the hazards and effects of both digital and conventional media while also acknowledging and enhancing the good, creative, and enjoyable aspects of popular culture. It incorporates production of media texts and critical thinking about media to help us navigate through an increasingly complex media landscape.

How Media Education Can Invigorate Adolescent Minds on Mental Health

The following are some methods that media education might stimulate adolescents' thoughts for social media mental health stability.

- i. **Information Dissemination:** This is one method that media education might stimulate teenage social media use. Information on the consequences and effects of exposure to various media platforms can be provided and disseminated through media education supported by public health-oriented research. Research indicates that teenagers who use Instagram, Pinterest, and Flickr may be

exposed to messages encouraging suicide, distorted body image, underage substance use, and unwanted media exposure. According to Chen and Lee (2020), Holland and Tiggermann (2020), Best and Manktelow (2019), and Slater and Tiggermann (2018).

- ii. **Influencing the Formation of Identity Development:**

Georgy and Wanda (2013) assert that social networking sites are a pervasive online presence that have a significant impact on how people build their identities through digital communication and engagement. In this sense, it becomes crucial to educate the youth through media education, as the majority of today's youth have lost their identities due to the falsehoods and unrealistic imagery linked with social media due to emergency and excessive use. Here, social media sites like Facebook may be used as teaching tools by educators. It reevaluates Facebook's potential as an educational tool that can foster dialogue between educators, parents of students, and community members to advance ethical online conduct, foster a deeper comprehension of curriculum concepts, and support young people's digital citizenship.

The following are some ways that media education can prevent the negative effects of social media exposure on mental health:

- i. **Creation And Promotion Of Social Media Mental Health Awareness:** This is one method that media education might improve teenagers' mental health

on social media. Thus, there is a strong and transparent effort to raise awareness of mental health issues.

- ii. **Critical Thinking:** In this sense, media education can help young people develop critical thinking skills about the media they must consume, including social media, as this will greatly assist them in identifying and opposing harmful media content that is detrimental to their health.
- iii. **Media Literacy:** Media literacy sometimes referred to as media education, can significantly reduce the threat to mental health posed by social media exposure. According to (Keller, 2005), media education teaches teenagers how to assess and analyze the media they watch and consume. Because doing so can aid in avoiding damaging and deceptive information.
- iv. **Self-expression:** Teenagers who get media education can develop the necessary abilities and self-assurance to express themselves openly and artistically on social media. They can also benefit from this in terms of enhancing their self-esteem and creating a positive internet profile (2013, Buckingham).
- v. **Digital Citizenship:** Adolescents may be educated about digital citizenship and the significance of using social media responsibly through thorough and effective media education. Additionally, it can assist kids in behaving appropriately and healthily when navigating virtual spaces (Ribble, 2015)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The social cognitive theory (SCT) developed by Albert Bandura and first proposed in 1986 serves as the theoretical foundation for this investigation.

According to the hypothesis, people may pick up new behaviors by watching and copying others, and cognitive functions like motivation, reinforcement, and attention are critical to this process. It is important to note that social cognitive theory can explain how teenagers monitor and mimic others' behavior on social media and how this might impact their mental health and well-being in order to support this study utilizing this theory, social media and mental health. Albert Bandura social learning theory (SLT) provides a formidable framework for a clearer understanding of the social media on mental health of adolescents. The theory is strongly related to this study by looking at the following key components of the theory:

- a. **Observational learning:** This entails the learning by observing others' behaviour, attitudes and outcomes.
- b. **Reciprocal determinism:** This has to do with an interaction between personal factors, environment and behaviour.
- c. **Reinforcement:** which are behaviour that are followed by rewards or punishments which influences learning.
- d. **Modeling:** here individuals tend to observe other peoples' behaviour and imitate them.

In summation, through the application of this theory to media education, educators, parents and caregivers can help adolescents to develop fundamental skills for healthy social media engagement, thus, reducing those negative impacts on mental health.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Numerous empirical reviews have been drawn to the research "Adolescents' exposure to the social media and its impact on their mental health: Reinvigorating

their minds through media education." A 2019 systematic analysis on the effects of social media on adolescent mental health discovered a link between teenage social media use and heightened symptoms of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Manktelow, Taylor & Best, 2019). Adolescents who used social media more often reported having more symptoms of anxiety and sadness, according to a two-year longitudinal research that also looked at the connection between social media usage and mental health (Paradkar, 2020; Carter, Rees, Hale & Bhattacharjee). The meta-analysis study also looked at how social media usage affected the mental health of teenagers and discovered a link between social media use and a rise in symptoms of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Huang & Li, 2019).

In a study carried out by Hinduja and Patchin (2010) on cyber bullying and mental health, it was found that adolescents who experienced cyber bullying were more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Media education in this case stands at a strong position in helping adolescents in developing skills to navigate online relationship and thus reducing the negative impact of cyber bullying. Kiraly, potenza stein, king, Hodgins, Saunders and Demetrovics (2019) also found out that there is a positive correlation between social media addiction and symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress among adolescents and through media education adolescents can recognise signs of addictions and develop a healthy social trait

METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes a combined-techniques research strategy incorporating both **quantitative** and qualitative survey research. Adolescents, teens, and young adults in the same age range who are frequent users of social media material make up the studies demographic. The

sample size consisted of two hundred (200) teenagers from the Abraka urban neighborhood. The questionnaire was used as the tool for data collection in the study, along with stratified and purposive sampling approaches. The data was analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and percentage counts.

Respondents were given 373 copies of the questionnaire in total. Only 354 of the 373 questionnaires distributed to respondents were returned entirely and precisely filled, while the remaining 19 surveys were returned but not accurately filled. This means that 95.0% of the questionnaires were returned, while 5% were misplaced. The researcher presented the data and analyzed the research findings using the 354 questionnaire as the basis for data analysis.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Socio-demographic characteristics

This section presents the distribution of respondents' socio demographic characteristics.

Table 1:
Socio-demographic of the respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	96	51.89
	Female	89	48.1
	Total	185	100.0
Age (years)	13-15	73	39.5
	16-18	112	60.5
	Total	185	100.0
Educational Qualification	Primary education	46	24.86
	Secondary education	118	63.78
	Higher education	21	11.35
	Total	185	100.0
Location	Rural	76	41.08
	Urban	109	58.92
	Total	185	100.0

Source: Author (2024)

The socio-demographic characteristics of those who took part in the survey are shown in Table 1. 51.89 percent of the

respondents were males, while 48.1 percent were females. The age distribution of the survey participants shows that 39.5 percent are between the ages of 13-15 years, and 60.5 percent are between the ages of 16-18 years. The respondents' educational qualifications revealed that 24.86 percent had primary school certificate, 63.78 percent had secondary school certificate, and 11.35 percent had higher education certificate. Finally, the respondents' geographical distribution revealed that 41.08 percent of them lived in rural areas and 58.92 percent in urban areas.

Analysis of Research Questions

RQ. 1: *What are the mental health challenges social media exposed adolescents to?*

RQ. 2: *What are the negative effects of social media on adolescents' mental health?*

Table 2:

Mental health challenges social media exposed adolescents to

ITEMS	Mean
Cyber bullying	3.37
Depression	3.18
Loneliness	2.98
Sexting	2.99
Anxiety	2.72
Sleep deprivation	2.76
Weighted average	3.0

Source: Author (2024)

Table 2 shows the average weighted mean of 3.0 for the overall mean score in the table. The mean score of 3.0 obtained for all the responses indicates that cyber bullying, depression, loneliness, sexting, anxiety and sleep deprivation are challenges adolescents face as a result of exposure to the social media. The use of descriptive statistics is supported by Wahua (2022a, 2022b), and Tsekpo & Wahua (2023).

Table 3:

The negative effects of social media on adolescents' mental health

ITEMS	Mean
Family crisis	2.80
Low self esteem	2.57
Academic decline	2.68
Deadly diseases	2.71
Abnormal behaviour	2.62
Unconformity with societal values	2.67
Weighted average	2.68

Source: Author (2024)

Table 3 shows the weighted mean average score of 2.68 for all the responses. The weighted mean score of 2.68 which is above the bench mean score of 2.50 reveals that, family crisis, low self-esteem, academic decline, deadly diseases, abnormal behaviour, unconformity with societal values are the effects of adolescent's exposure to the social media.

CONCLUSION

Discussion of Result of Findings

Table 2 which reveals that cyber bullying, depression, loneliness, sexting, anxiety and sleep deprivation are challenges of adolescent's exposure to the social media is supported by the view of a national poll conducted by the national campaign on sexting to support teen and unplanned pregnancy, states that 20% of teenagers do involve themselves on sexual activity. While on cyber bullying the American Psychological (APA) in conjunction with Ramasubbu (2016) corroborate the fact that cyber bullying is an aggressive conduct by one person that creates discomfort for another. While Izuogu (2007) opines that among young people in the third world, who may be impacted by the exposure to Western media, ACC media globalization may also promote negative values, such as; pornography, drug addiction, rape and semi-nudity.

Table 3 which reveals that family crisis, low self – esteem, academic decline, deadly diseases, abnormal behaviour and unconformity with societal values are the main effects of adolescent’s exposure is corroborated by (Obawo & Koblowe, 2018), that teenage use of social media has undoubtedly had a negative influence on adolescent’s personal lives and as well as the family at large. Social Media is usually flooded with messages that depict sexual impropriety. Music, home videos and dramas teach young people that being irresponsible is the fastest path to wealth. Advertisements also encourage underage sex and use of condom. (Jude & John, 2009) strengthening this view, also states that, there is an alternative perspective that suggests teenage exposure to social media increases the risk of adolescents contacting life threatening sexually transmitted infections such as Hiv/ Aids. As also agreed by (Hinkly & Tylor, 2012), juvenile health as being affected as a result of their exposure to the social media. Prostitution, stealing, unruliness, rape, intoxication and lawlessness has come the order of the day.

Conclusion

Even while social media has been praised widely for its contributions to humankind's many activities, its use and exposure have had some detrimental effects on society overall, particularly on the teenage stratum. One of the main issues this group of people dealt with was mental health issues, such as depression, cyber bullying, sex, pornography, gangsterism, etcetera. As a result, these continue to negatively affect the adolescent's psychology, emotions, behavior, and overall well-being as well as those of their family and the larger community. Therefore, it is important to manage, educate, and cheek-sensitize teenagers to their use of social media and exposure to it.

Recommendations

In connection with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- a. There should, as a matter of urgency, the provision of media education to adolescents in the country.
- b. There should be media censorship restriction on media programme consumed by adolescents.
- c. There should be orientation and reorientation on media uses by the adolescents.
- d. Parents, guardians, media planners, psychologists, educationists as well as counselors should be alive to their responsibility of educating the adolescents on the use of social media and its impacts on their mental health.

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