

Original Paper

Social Media Use: A Risk Factor for Depression among School Adolescents in Enugu State of Nigeria

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Abstract

Social media just like the rest of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) channels aid and promote speedy and easy access to information more especially among school adolescents. Social media use among school adolescents is a double-edged sword as they use them to connect friends and find information about many things including learning. However, they also spend too much time on them which affect their mental health and may cause them depression. This research investigated on the social media use: A risk factor for depression among school adolescents' depression in Enugu State. Descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. The population of the study was all the school adolescents in Enugu State. Stratified random sampling was used to select 800 adolescents from 4 states. In each of the four states, 200 adolescents were selected. Self-structured questionnaire and Hamilton depression scale were used to elicit information for data collection. The results were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations. The findings revealed that many adolescents spend up to 10 hours daily on social media, they prefers chatting on social media to talking to their parents, among other behaviours. The findings also indicated that; adolescents who spend up to 10 hours daily on social media have decreased activities and feeling of incapacity, adolescents who don't have enough sleep in the night due their use of social media experience hallucination, low mood among other findings.

Keywords

depression, social media, adolescents, cyber bullying, failure to achieve nigh use of social media

1. Introduction

The use of social media in everyday life activities is a relatively recent development that is welcome by the old and the young. Social media offer immeasurable benefits to humanity by creating a world in which people can gaze into their own crystal ball to see what their friends are doing at almost any time of the day. The world in fact has been reduced to a global village. Social media applications actually are changing virtually everything now more than ever before, such as how we connect and make friends that are immediate and those in far-away lands, how we transact businesses, market our products and purchase goods.

All these have changed drastically these days. In the same vein, access to information for personal and social use is also changing in a quick way. The changes in the telecommunication sector according to Abdullahi et al. (2018) has increased internet access and use among the general public and young people in particular.

Young people especially adolescents in schools benefit from social media in a tremendous manner, as they offer students the opportunities to connect with friends and peers and have access to educational resources such as learning materials, online tutoring, study and or educational tips. Nevertheless, the way young people especially the adolescents are actively involved in global online communication through social media has become a source of worry for researchers, parents and educators, as they (adolescents) spend more time on social media than on real world, making friends easier online and making connections in far-away countries. Adolescents in Nigeria according to researches spend less time with their friends in person, less time reading their books or sleeping and more time on digital media (Abdullahi et al., 2018).

While social media use has become an integral part of daily life of an adolescent, there are number of risks associated with social media use especially the negative effects on mental health such as depression, anxiety, suicide, worry, low self-esteem, suicide thoughts and so on. Research on social media use according to Chonning (2020) is a new focus area. Although a large number of studies on social media use and mental health with different vantage points has been conducted in both local and international journals. However, the researcher of the work feels that not much has been done on how social media use can lead to depression using any depression rating scale. For this work, the focus is on depression, highlighting on how social media raise depression.

Social media can be defined as an interaction among people in which they create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Social media technologies are in different forms including magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video rating and social bookmarks (Ali et al., 2018). Social media according to Cambridge Dictionary (2019) are websites and computer programmes that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet, using a computer or mobile phone.

There are seven types of social media which include:

- Photo sharing (instagram, snap chat, pinterest)
- Blogs and micro blogs (such as Twitter, umbir)
- Social news networking sites (such as dig and leaker net)
- Content communities (such as You Tube and Daily motion)
- Social networking sites (such as Facebook, Linkedin, Google +, WhatsApp)
- Virtual game-worlds (such as World War craft)
- Virtual social world (such as second life)
- Collative projects (such as Wikipedia) (Kaplan et al., 2010; Cheung et al., 2011).

Among all these social media types, the most commonly used by school adolescents include:

1) Photo sharing, Blogs and Micro blogs, content communities, and social networking sites.

Social media are dynamic and interactive computer mediated communication tools with high penetrating rates in the general population in high and middle class levels.

Depression on its own is a mood disorder that is characterized by persistently low mood and a feeling of sadness and loss of interest. It is a persistent problem that may last 6-8 months. It is the most common illness worldwide and the leading cause of disability (Markus, 2017). Depression is defined by Higuera and Holland (2019) as a mood disorder or feelings of sadness, loss or anger that interferes with an individual's everyday activities, people experience in different ways. It may interfere with one's daily activities, resulting in lost time and low productivity. It can also influence relationships and some chronic health conditions such as asthma, arthritis, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity. It is important to note that feeling of down at times is normal part of life, but if it persists up to 6 months, or becomes a regular experience, it is depression. Depression is also viewed by Ali et al. (2018) as a cluster of specific symptoms that have associated with impairment. The clinical and diagnostic features of the disorder are broadly similar in adolescents and adults.

Adolescence according to Psychology Today (2019) is transitional stage from childhood to adulthood which occurs between ages 13-19 although the physical and psychological changes that take place can start earlier during the preteen years between ages 9-12. Adolescence is a time of both disorientation and discovery. The transitional period can raise questions of independence and identity; as adolescents cultivate their sense of self, they may face difficult choices about academics, friendships, sexuality, gender identity, and alcohol. They tend to have more egocentric view and often focus on themselves and feel that they are the centre of attraction from the best and closest friend to the most distant one. They may grapple with insecurities and feelings of being judged. The transition can naturally lead to anxiety about the physical changes to one's body and his or her evolving relationship with others and the larger world. Apart from physical and sexual maturation, adolescents also desire movement towards social, economic and moral independence where they will be free, earn their living, control their sense of judgment and socialize, and identify (Brown, 2008). However, the duration and defining

characteristics of this period may vary across time and space, cultures and sociometric circumstances (Shonde, 2010; WHO, 2015).

While adolescence is a time of tremendous growth potential, it is also a time of considerable risks during which social contexts such as social media exert powerful influence on character building which may result in changing attitudes and behaviours for most adolescents. Despite the popularity of social media platforms and the rapidity with which they have inserted themselves into nearly all facets of our lives, there is a remarkable lack of clear data about how they affect us personally, our behaviours, our emotions and mental health. However, studies according to Mammoser (2018) have linked the use of social media to depression, anxiety, poor sleep quality, low self-esteem among other mental health problems especially in adolescents. Heid (2019) states that a substantial amount of research has found associations between heavy technology use and poor mental health outcomes among adolescents and young people. Research aside, many parents teachers, guidance and counselors and other people believe that social media and heavy technology use are a problem. It is because digital technology tends to expose adolescents to over load of information and stimulations, and a much bigger sphere of influence. Due to vulnerability and the intensive need for intimate and healthy social connections during adolescence stage, social media are likely to influence young people.

The notion that social media has a negative impact on depression is widespread. For instance, studies by Diego according to Miller (2018) revealed that smartphones were introduced in 2007 and by 2015, fully 92% of adolescents owned smartphones. The rise in depressive symptoms correlates with smartphone adoption during that period, even when matched year by year. At the same period, the reports on students seeking help principally for depression and anxiety jumped to 30% between 2010 and 2015. Adolescents these days usually look to social media for connecting friends and seeing the world. The use of social media such as Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and many others have grown almost in lockstep with the rate of mental health problems. Epidemiological studies according to Sulcel (2019) have revealed a strong correlation between social media and symptoms of depression.

There had been a lot of arguments on the actual relationship between social media and depression, and how social media can influence depression or cause depression among adolescents. A new study out of Texas State University suggests that it is how social media are used not the tool itself that may lie behind the correlation (Sulcel, 2019). Asmelash (2019) on her own, asserts that social media itself does not harm people, rather its frequent use. Another research in support of the assertion according to Asmelash opines that it is social media contents which young people are exposed to and its check spelling of healthy sleep and exercise that cause problems.

In Nigeria, many adolescents especially those in higher and middle class levels living in cities may have been spending too much time on social media. Such adolescents usually fail in the academic performances which may also affect their mental health. Many parents teachers and educators in Enugu State worry so much as greater percentage of adolescents spend their time on Twitter, Facebook, Video

games, WhatsApp, Instagram, at the expense of their education and interaction with their real friends and parent.

An adolescent who spends several hours a day on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Video games and so on is likely to have less time to study, relate to physical friends and parents. Such adolescent may have social media anxiety disorder which can affect both physical and mental health. Spending too much time on social media has been proven to cause a lot of ill health and depression. For instance, according to Miller (2018), a recent research proved that there is a link between social media and depression among social media users who spend the most of their time on Instagram, Facebook and other platforms. Such people were reported to have a substantially higher rate of depression about sixty-six percent (66%) than those who spend the less time.

There are many sources through which social media may lead to depression among adolescents. These include:

- **Teen's night time use of social media:** Adolescents who engage in social media during the night could be damaging their sleep and increasing their risk of depression and anxiety. Research on over use of social media showed that night time use specifically correlate to poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem, higher levels of anxiety and depression (Heid, 2019). Young people usually stay up late to use social media and are woken up by alarm coming from their phones beside their beds, making them depressed and anxious (Ampbell, 2019). Teenagers are so emotionally invested in social media that many of them will wake up at night and log in just to make sure that they do not miss out.

Perhaps, the worst thing about this is that adolescents need more sleep than adults do, so night time social media use could be detrimental to their health. Research has shown that adolescents need 9.5 hours of sleep each day but unfortunately, many of them do not get up to six hours (6 hrs) sleep. This lack of sleep according Udorie (2019) can make them depressed, irritable among other ill health.

- Another theory about the increase in depression is the loss of self-esteem especially in female adolescents who when they compare themselves negatively with artificial curated images of those with prettier, thinner appearance and more popular and richer, feel less attractive and worried. According to the study, many girls are bombarded with the most perfect pictures of their online friends and or celebrities and influencers who do a lot of photographing and makeup and hair teams. If the girls feel that these are normal, it is likely to affect their self-confidence (Miller, 2018). Curation of perfect images usually makes adolescents inadequate. Sometimes, adolescents feel like joining the utopic world of their online friends but cannot. This also brings depressive mood especially on those with negative emotions and lack of sense of belonging.

- **Failure to achieve:** Another possible source of depression may be what adolescents fail to achieve when spending too much time on social media, such as accomplishment on academic excellence, admission into a higher school or promotion to higher grade. When a student who spends much of his or her time on social media fails to achieve academically, it may lead to regrets, anger and

depression. Such adolescents do not know that when they spend too much time online and less time studying that it cuts down their academic performance, and failure in academic performance has been proven to have a link with depression and suicide.

- **Cyber bullying:** Cyber bullying refers to typical bullying behaviours such as verbal abuse, Mocking, insults and threats, transmitted over electronic media like e-mails, mobile phones, text messages and internet sites where an individual is ridiculed, insulted, or ostracized. Social network increased in recent years and with it the bullying, causing problems in young people's mental health. These problems' are expressed according to Ehararifa et al. (2017) through depressive symptoms suicide ideas and suicide attempts for instance, many female adolescent who are blackmailed, or ridiculed through internet are likely to experience depressive mood.

The statement of problem of this research works argues that social media primary functions are to aid and promote speedy and easy access to information among the world population including Nigeria. However, adolescents are the most frequent users especially those in the school, and school leavers. These young people use social media to connect friends online get information about virtually everything they supposed to know about themselves and their environments. They also use social media to get information about job opportunities, school admissions and academic achievement. Regrettably, this emerging trend has drastically changed adolescents' attitudes, orientations and values to an extent that many of them prefer connections and interactions in social media to their interactions with parents, siblings, peers and teachers. They therefore spend most of their time on Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter among others connecting friends rather than learning. This social media abuse may lead to much mental health such as depression.

This paper investigates the influence of social media on adolescents' depression in Enugu State.

The major objective of this study is to investigate on social media use as a risk factor for depression among school adolescents' in Enugu State. In specific terms, the study tries to;

- 1) Find out if adolescents spend most of their time on social media.
- 2) Find out the sources of social media that can cause depressive behaviours among adolescents.

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) How do school adolescents use social media?
- 2) What are the sources of social media that can cause depression among school adolescents?

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population of the study was the entire adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 4 local Government Areas in Enugu State. These include; Igbo-Etiti, Nsukka, Enugu South, and Udenu Local Government Areas. From each Local Government, 200 adolescents were selected, 100 males and 100 females. In all, there were 800 adolescents 400 males and 400 females for the study.

The instrument for data collection was a 23 item structured questionnaire out of the 23 items, 12 items were developed personally by the researcher, while 11 items were adapted from Hamilton depression

HAM-D rating scale (Hamilton, 1960). It was divided into 3 parts. Part A was used to elicit information about the participants' particulars, part B was used to find out if adolescents spend too much time on social media, while section C was adopted from Hamilton depression rating scale to elicit data about the effects of social media on depression among adolescents.

The data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation. The criterion for acceptance of the mean score was 2.5 and above, why any score below was rejected. The questionnaire was face – validated by psychiatric doctor and a psychologist.

Research question one:

How do school adolescents use social media?

Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Social Media Use among School Adolescents

| S/N | How school adolescents use social media | \bar{X} | SD | Dec. |
|-----|--|-----------|------|------|
| 1 | Many adolescents use up to 10 and above hours daily chatting on social media | 3.35 | 0.73 | Acc |
| 2 | Adolescents prefer chatting on WhatsApp and Facebook to talking to their parents. | 3.25 | 0.71 | Acc |
| 3 | Most adolescent engage on 4-6 social media | 2.40 | 0.80 | Rej |
| 4 | Many adolescents spend their siesta period on social media | 2.58 | 0.72 | Acc |
| 5 | Many adolescents usually stay awake up to 2.00 AM on social media | 3.18 | 1.00 | Acc |
| 6 | Adolescents get bored any day they fail to exercise their online connections. | 1.70 | 0.84 | Rej |
| 7 | Adolescents have more friends online than physical ones | 2.25 | 0.84 | Rej |
| 8 | Adolescents prefer searching for solution to their problems online to discussing with their parents. | 3.20 | 0.79 | Acc |
| 9 | Adolescents make connecting friends online a hobby | 2.14 | 0.80 | Rej |
| 10 | Adolescents use time for reading to chatting online | 2.91 | 0.63 | Acc |
| 11 | Adolescents eat and chat online simultaneously | 2.60 | 0.99 | Acc |
| 12 | Many adolescents chat on WhatsApp and or Facebook during class. | 1.72 | 0.84 | Rej |

The result in Table 1, revealed that the respondents rated items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 11 out of 12 of the items as indicating the adolescents who spend most of their time on social media. These accepted items have 2.5 points and above, while items 3, 6, 7 and 9 were rejected.

Research question two:

What are the sources of social media that can cause depression among adolescents?

Table 2. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Sources of Social Media Use that Can Cause Depression

| S/N | Way through which social media can be risk factors for depressive behaviours. (400 respondent) | \bar{X} | SD | Dec. |
|-----|--|-----------|------|------|
| 1 | Adolescents who spend up to ten hours daily on social media have decreased social activities and feelings of incapacity | 3.25 | 0.72 | Acc |
| 2 | Adolescents who stay awake up to 2.00 AM may experience insomnia initial, headache and low mood | 3.18 | 1.01 | Acc |
| 3 | Adolescents who do not have enough sleep in the night because they use social media may experience hallucination, low mood, irritability. | 2.89 | 0.68 | Acc |
| 4 | Adolescents who compare themselves with artificial curated images online, may have low self-esteem and lack of interest on themselves. | 2.73 | 0.74 | Acc |
| 5 | Adolescents who prefer the environment of their online friends to their own environment experience gloomy attitude and percsimisism about the future | 1.77 | 0.84 | rej |
| 6 | Adolescents who feel uglier than the images on social media have self-hate and withdrawal. | 1.83 | 0.86 | Rej |
| 7 | When adolescents lose their admission due to over use of social media they feel guilty and that life is not worth living. | 3.26 | 0.62 | Acc |
| 8 | When adolescents spend all their time on social media and fail in examinations they have feelings of sadness, tendency to weep and suicide ideas. | 2.86 | 0.97 | Acc |
| 9 | If an adolescent is blackmailed by their assumed online friends, they lose appetite, have palpitation and lack of sleep. | 3.25 | 0.84 | Acc |
| 10 | When adolescents receive threats online they experience insomnia middle, fear and loss of libido | 2.88 | 0.96 | Acc |
| 11 | Adolescents who are mocked and or cajoled online usually lose weight, have inferiority complex and self-absorption. | 2.73 | 0.74 | Acc |

The data in Table 2 indicated that the respondents rated items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 11 as some sources through which social media can cause depression among adolescents. The results revealed that the respondents agreed that sources of social media influence on depression among adolescents were adolescents night engagement on social media which were on items 1, 2, and 3, adolescents loss of self-esteem as they compare themselves with their online friends which is on item 4, adolescents' failure to achieve which is on items 7 and 8 and finally cyber bullying on adolescents which is on items 9, 10 and 11.

2. Discussion

The data in table one revealed that school adolescents in Enugu State engage in social media. The data indicated that school adolescents in Enugu State spend much of their time on social media through the following; using up to 10 hours and above on social media daily, prefer chatting on WhatsApp and Facebook to talking to their parents and siblings. This finding is in line with the findings by Abdullahi et al. (2018) which showed that adolescents in Nigeria spend more time on social media than with their parents and physical friends. Other findings include; using their siesta period on social media, staying awake in the night on social media, preferring searching for solution to their problems online to discussing with their parents, using time for reading to chatting online and eating and chatting online at the same time.

In table two, the data revealed that; night engagements on social media by adolescents may lead to depression. This finding supports a research carried out by Udorie (2015) which showed that adolescents who use social media during the night could be damaging their sleep and increasing their risk of anxiety and depression. Other findings include; that loss of self-esteem and failure to achieve are sources through which social media could cause depression, that cyber bullying may also lead to depression. This supports the finding by John et al. (2018) who after a research concluded that victims of cyber bullying are at greater risk of depression, self-harm, and suicide behaviours than non-victims.

3. Conclusion

Social media refers to interaction among people in which they create, share and or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Currently, there are multiple social resources. The advent of S.M and smart phones is not only a strategy for improving social interactions but also contributes to impair health of Nigerian adolescents especial in Enugu State.

Many researches have proven a correlation between the use of S.M and depression especially among adolescents.

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