

Influence of Social Media on Secondary School Students' Learning of Sexual Education In Nigeria

Turnwait Otu Michael

Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
mturnwait@uj.ac.za

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of various factors on the knowledge of sexual education among adolescent students in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the role of social media (SM) engagement. A sample of 1,136 participants was surveyed, and logistic regression analysis was conducted to assess the associations between demographic variables, SM use patterns, and content engagement on SM platforms with the knowledge of sexual education. Findings reveal significant associations between several factors and knowledge of sexual education. Older students (aged 15 and above), senior secondary students, and those attending private schools demonstrate higher odds of possessing sexual education knowledge. Notably, participants who engage with SM platforms for 1-3 hours per week exhibit increased odds of having knowledge, while excessive SM use (more than 6 hours per week) is associated with decreased odds of knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, content engagement on SM shows varying associations, with educational content positively correlated with knowledge acquisition, and entertainment content negatively correlated. These results underscore the importance of considering diverse factors, including demographics and SM use behaviors, in promoting sexual education among adolescent populations. Strategies aimed at enhancing sexual education programs should take into account the differential impact of SM engagement and content preferences on knowledge acquisition. Addressing these factors can contribute to the development of more effective interventions for promoting sexual health literacy among adolescents in Nigeria and similar contexts.

Keywords: Social Media, Sexual Education, Learning, Secondary School, Students

Introduction

Sexual education, also known as sex education, encompasses the provision of information, skills, and attitudes pertaining to sexuality, sexual health, relationships, and reproductive anatomy and physiology (Fentahun et al., 2012; UNESCO, 2023). Its fundamental objective is to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of human sexuality, instill healthy attitudes and behaviors, and empower individuals to make informed and responsible decisions regarding their sexual health (Cumper et al., 2024; Pincock et al., 2023). Traditionally, the responsibility of delivering sex education rested with immediate family members, but societal shifts driven by modernization, western civilization, and evolving family structures have eroded this practice (Barak & Fisher, 2001; Fatemi et al., 2023). Consequently, adolescents find themselves relying on broader societal influences, potentially receiving inaccurate information during their crucial transition to adulthood (Astatke et al., 2023; Odekeye et al., 2023). Recognizing this void, schools have sought to fill it through the incorporation of sex education into social studies and related subjects' curricula (Chavula et al., 2022).

Social media, encompassing online platforms facilitating the creation, sharing, and exchange of textual, visual, and multimedia content, has become an omnipresent element in modern communication (Odojin & Queen, 2023; Tkacová et al., 2022). These platforms serve

as arenas for social interaction, connecting individuals in virtual communities, and influencing various facets of society, including information dissemination, entertainment, and social connectivity (Amjad et al., 2022; Kubheka et al., 2020). The prevalent use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, video platforms, messaging applications like WhatsApp, Skype, and text messaging among students has further integrated social media into their daily lives (Barfi et al., 2021; Ekpenyong & Michael, 2016).

As students frequently engage with social media for communication, entertainment, and educational purposes, the potential impact on their understanding of sex education cannot be ignored. Sex education, in the context of this study, involves the acquisition of information, skills, and services enabling students to adopt safe sexual behaviors (Okah et al., 2023; Sidamo et al., 2023). The exploration of the influence of social media on the learning of sex education among secondary school students is crucial for understanding and potentially controlling their sexual behaviors (Nguyen et al., 2022; Onoshakpokaiye & Anthonia, 2023).

Studies have demonstrated that sexual education programs contribute to increased knowledge and a subsequent reduction in harmful sexual practices among secondary school students (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023; Kamaludin et al., 2022). Considering the widespread access to the internet, including social media, among students, the relationship between social media and sexual education becomes particularly pertinent (Kaidbey et al., 2023; Ngwoke et al., 2022). Social networking sites and text messaging, being popular among students, offer avenues through which information, both educational and sexual, is disseminated (Bozzola et al., 2022; Nannim et al., 2022).

Presently, a significant percentage of secondary school students own mobile phones, with a considerable portion using social networking sites and text messaging extensively (Muthami et al., 2023; Ngwoke et al., 2022; Odekeye et al., 2023). The integration of social media in school communication and the potential benefits of media messaging in addressing sexual challenges among students have been explored (Bozzola et al., 2022; Ekpenyong & Michael, 2016; Håkansson et al., 2023). However, the effects of social media sites on the learning of sexual education among secondary school students have not been thoroughly examined.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the effects of social media on the learning of sexual education among secondary school students. The research will specifically focus on evaluating the frequency, content, and purpose of students' engagement with these digital platforms, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of social media's influence on sex education. The findings are essential for improving the knowledge of sexuality among secondary school students, thereby contributing to their overall well-being and reducing the risk of sexually related diseases and infections (Emenike et al., 2023; Yohanna et al., 2023). In the broader context of positive behavioral interventions through social media in various sectors, this study seeks to shed light on the overlooked aspect of social media's impact on sexual education, ultimately enhancing students' understanding of sexuality (Fentahun et al., 2012; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, 2022).

Method

Study Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design to assess the influence of social media on the learning of sexual education among secondary school students. A cross-sectional design was suitable for capturing a snapshot of the population at a specific point in time, making them ideal for investigating the relationships between variables.

Study Setting

The research was conducted in Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo State, Nigeria. Ibadan was selected as the study setting due to its diverse population and representation of urban and suburban contexts, providing a comprehensive view of the impact of social media on sexual education among secondary school students.

Population and Sample

The target population included secondary school students in Ibadan, Nigeria, from both public and private schools. A representative sample of 1,170 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was based on factors such as school type (public/private), gender, and grade level.

Sampling Procedure

A list of secondary schools in Ibadan was obtained, and schools were stratified based on the criteria including school type, gender, and grade level. From each stratum, a random sample of schools was selected. Within the selected schools, students were randomly chosen from different grade levels.

Data Collection Instruments

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data. The questionnaire included sections on demographics, social media usage patterns, frequency of engagement, content exposure, and the perceived impact on sexual education. The questions on sexual education were designed to align with the Nigerian Family Life and HIV Education programme using UNESCO's global Sexuality Education Review and Assessment Tool (SERAT).

Data Collection Procedure

Permission was sought from relevant educational authorities, school administrators, and parents. Informed consent was obtained from both the participating schools and students. The copies of the questionnaire were administered in-person during school hours, ensuring a conducive environment for data collection. Four trained research assistants supported in field data collection.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software version 29. The independent variables included frequency of social media use, types of social media platforms used, and content exposure. The dependent variable was knowledge of sexual education. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to describe the demographic characteristics and social media usage patterns. Inferential statistics, including regression analysis, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis, were employed to explore relationships between variables. Only variables that were significant at the chi-square tests level were proceeded to the regression analysis model. The regression model evaluation indicates that the model as a whole was statistically significant (Omnibus tests: $p < 0.001$). The Nagelkerke R square of 0.524 suggests that the model explains a substantial portion of the variability in the dependent variable. In addition, the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test ($p = 0.811$) indicates a good fit of the model to the data.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw without consequences for participants. Informed consent was obtained from both participants and relevant authorities.

Results

Table 1 provides a breakdown of chi-square statistics on the relationship between various variables and the knowledge of sexual education among a sample of 1,136 participants. The results suggest that gender, age, grade, type of school, SM platforms, frequency of SM use, and content preference on SM are all associated with the knowledge of sexual education among the participants. For instance, a higher percentage of females (61.4%) have knowledge of sexual education compared to males (61.4%). Participants aged 15 and above (72.8%) show a higher knowledge compared to those under 15 (59.1%). Senior secondary students (SS1-SS3) have a higher knowledge (82.1%) compared to junior secondary students (JSS1-JSS3) (54.8%). Students in private schools (71.7%) show a higher knowledge compared to those in public schools (61.5%). Participants engaging with educational content on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok have varying levels of knowledge. Those who use SM for more than 6 hours a week have a higher knowledge (95.4%) compared to other frequency categories. Participants engaging with educational content (91.7%) have higher knowledge compared to those focused on entertainment, news, and socializing.

Table 1. Number and percentage distribution of knowledge of sexual education among students according to sociodemographic variables (n = 1,136).

Variables	Knowledge of Sexual Education (n = 1,136)			X ²	p-values
	No Number (%)	Yes Number (%)	Total Number (%)		
Gender					
Male	220 (38.6)	350 (61.4)	570 (100)	14.096	<0.001
Female	159 (28.1)	407 (71.9)	566 (100)		
Age					
Under 15	210 (40.9)	304 (59.1)	514 (100)	23.710	<0.001
15+	169 (27.2)	453 (72.8)	622 (100)		
Grade					
Junior Secondary (JSS1-JSS3)	291 (45.2)	353 (54.8)	644 (100)	93.503	<0.001
Senior Secondary (SS1-SS3)	88 (17.9)	404 (82.1)	492 (100)		
Type of School					
Public	217 (38.5)	347 (61.5)	564 (100)	13.169	<0.001
Private	162 (28.3)	410 (71.7)	572 (100)		
SM platforms					
Facebook	21 (15.4)	115 (84.6)	136 (100)	59.804	<0.001
Instagram	80 (43.0)	106 (57.0)	186 (100)		
X(formerly Twitter)	28 (24.1)	88(75.9)	116 (100)		
WhatsApp	148 (45.1)	180 (54.9)	328 (100)		
YouTube	32 (33.3)	64 (66.7)	96 (100)		
TikTok	70 (25.5)	204 (74.5)	274 (100)		
Frequency of SM use in a week					
Less than 1 hour	162 (45.3)	196 (54.7)	358 (100)	253.711	<0.001
1-3 hours	83 (39.9)	125 (60.1)	208 (100)		
4-6 hours	18 (4.6)	374 (95.4)	392 (100)		
More than 6 hours	116 (65.2)	62 (34.8)	178 (100)		
Content mostly engaged with on SM					
Educational content	20 (8.3)	222 (91.7)	242 (100)	172.909	<0.001
Entertainment content	81 (60.4)	53 (39.6)	134 (100)		
News and current affairs	80 (22.7)	272 (77.3)	352 (100)		
Socializing with friends	198 (48.5)	210 (51.5)	408 (100)		

Note: n – number, X² – Chi-square value

Table 2 presents the results of a logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between various independent variables and the dependent variable, which appears to be knowledge of sexual education. The results show that participants aged 15 and above have 1.6 times the odds of having knowledge compared to those under 15. Although the p-value (0.051) is slightly above the conventional threshold of 0.05, it suggests a borderline significant association. Senior secondary students (SS1-SS3) have 2.3 times the odds of having knowledge compared to junior secondary students (JSS1-JSS3). Private school students have 3.5 times the odds of having knowledge compared to public school students. For each SM platform (except WhatsApp), the odds ratios do not significantly differ from 1.000 (the reference category). WhatsApp users have significantly lower odds (0.159 times) of having knowledge compared to Facebook users. Participants who use SM for 1-3 hours have 2 times the odds of having knowledge compared to those using it less than 1 hour. Similarly, participants who use SM for 4-6 hours have 3.2 times the odds of having knowledge compared to those using it less than 1 hour. However, those using SM for more than 6 hours have significantly lower odds (0.189 times) of having knowledge compared to those using it less than 1 hour. Participants engaging with entertainment content have 0.647 times the odds of having knowledge compared to those engaging with educational content. Those engaging with news and current affairs, as well as socializing with friends, also have significantly lower odds of knowledge.

Table 2. Logistic regression coefficients of the likelihood of having knowledge of sexual education among students according to sociodemographic variables (n = 1,136)

Variables	S.E.	Wald	p-value	Odds ratio	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Gender						
Male (RC)				1.000		
Female	0.364	0.002	0.965	0.984	0.482	2.008
Age						
Under 15 (RC)				1.000		
15+	0.252	3.819	0.051	1.637	0.999	2.683
Grade						
Junior Secondary (JSS1-JSS3) (RC)				1.000		
Senior Secondary (SS1-SS3)	0.277	15.413	<0.001	2.336***	1.195	3.580
Type of School						
Public (RC)				1.000		
Private	0.259	22.962	<0.001	3.460***	2.082	5.748
SM platforms						
Facebook (RC)				1.000		
Instagram	0.462	0.019	0.890	1.066	0.431	2.635
X(formerly Twitter)	0.552	2.414	0.120	0.424	0.144	1.251
WhatsApp	0.679	7.317	0.007	0.159**	0.042	0.603
YouTube	0.837	0.471	0.497	1.776	0.345	9.149
TikTok	0.691	0.442	0.506	1.583	0.408	6.140
Frequency of SM use in a week						
Less than 1 hour (RC)				1.000		
1-3 hours	0.424	58.236	<0.001	2.039***	1.017	3.091
4-6 hours	0.441	13.128	0.007	3.180**	1.919	5.168
More than 6 hours	0.417	16.014	<0.001	0.189***	0.083	0.427
Content mostly engaged with on SM						
Educational content (RC)				1.000		
Entertainment content	0.488	51.062	<0.001	0.647***	0.550	1.932
News and current affairs	0.693	17.470	<0.001	0.833***	0.660	0.956
Socializing with friends	0.604	8.080	0.004	0.569**	0.170	1.199
Overall model evaluation						

Omnibus tests: 538.828***

Nagelkerke R square: 0.524

-2 log likelihood: 907.794

Hosmer and Lemeshow Test: 0.811

Significance at * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; RC - reference category; CI - confidence interval

Discussion

The study revealed that individuals aged 15 and above were 1.6 times more likely to possess knowledge of sexual education compared to those under 15. Although the p-value (0.051) slightly exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.05, indicating a borderline significant association. A previous study conducted in South Africa discovered a correlation between age disparity and sexuality education (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023). Similarly, the current study found that senior secondary students (SS1-SS3) were 2.3 times more likely to possess knowledge of sexual education compared to junior secondary students (JSS1-JSS3). Moreover, private school students were 3.5 times more likely to have knowledge compared to their counterparts in public schools. This aligns with findings from a study in Nigeria, which indicated that school type significantly moderates the relationship between social media and substance abuse among secondary school students (Odojin & Queen, 2023). Interestingly, odds ratios for each social media platform (except WhatsApp) did not significantly deviate from 1.000, the reference category. Notably, WhatsApp users were 84.1% less likely to possess knowledge of sexual education compared to Facebook users, as indicated by a previous study in Nigeria which found that WhatsApp usage did not negatively impact students' academic performance in English Language except in cases of addiction (Odekeye et al., 2023).

Participants who used social media for 1-3 hours were twice as likely to possess knowledge compared to those using it less than 1 hour. Similarly, those who used social media for 4-6 hours had 3.2 times the odds of having knowledge of sexual education compared to those using it less than 1 hour. However, individuals using social media for more than 6 hours were 81.1% less likely to possess knowledge compared to those using it less than 1 hour. A study conducted in Kenya found that excessive use of social media led to negative outcomes, including school dropouts among students (Muthami et al., 2023). Participants engaging with entertainment content had a 64% lower likelihood of possessing knowledge of sexual education compared to those engaging with educational content. Similarly, individuals engaging with news and current affairs, as well as socializing with friends, also had significantly lower odds of possessing knowledge of sexual education. This corroborates findings from a study in China, which highlighted the significant influence of live streaming in delivering sexuality education (Kaidbey et al., 2023).

Limitations

The study was limited by the self-reporting nature of the questionnaire and potential biases in social media metrics. Additionally, the cross-sectional design did not capture long-term effects. However, efforts were made to mitigate these limitations through careful questionnaire design guided by international standardized items and rigorous sampling techniques.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The impact of social media on the sexual education of adolescent students varies, and it is influenced by various factors such as the content they encounter, the accuracy of

information, and the context in which it is presented. Social media has the potential to both improve and reduce sexual education. This is because social media provides a platform for the dissemination of sexual education information to a wide audience. Adolescents can access information on reproductive health, safe practices, and relationships. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube allow educators and organizations to share engaging and informative content that may resonate with adolescents, making sexual education more accessible. Social media platforms can enable adolescents to engage in discussions about sexual health with peers, fostering a sense of community and encouraging open conversations.

However, it should be noted that not all information on social media is accurate or evidence-based. Misinformation or biased content can lead to misconceptions and incorrect understanding of sexual health. Adolescents may encounter explicit or inappropriate content on social media, which may not align with the goals of comprehensive sexual education programs. Social media can contribute to the perpetuation of unrealistic expectations, social pressures, and harmful stereotypes related to sex and relationships. Discussing sensitive topics on public platforms may compromise the privacy of adolescents, making them hesitant to seek or share information.

In conclusion, while social media has the potential to enhance sexual education by providing information, support, and a platform for discussion, careful consideration and regulation are necessary to mitigate the risks associated with misinformation and inappropriate content. A comprehensive approach that includes reliable sources, age-appropriate content, and offline support systems is crucial for promoting positive sexual education experiences for adolescents.

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