

Original Research Article

Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Behaviour in South-South, Nigeria

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Article History

Received: 28.11.2025

Accepted: 23.01.2026

Published: 28.01.2026

Journal homepage:
<https://www.easpubisher.com>

Quick Response Code

Abstract: The influence of social media on adolescent behaviour is significant because adolescence is a critical stage of emotional, social, and cognitive development. Social media can have both positive effects including social connection, learning and awareness and identity formation and negative effects such as addiction and time management problems, cyberbullying and peer pressure and risky behaviour on young people. This study aims to evaluate the Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Behaviour in South-South, Nigeria. This was a cross-sectional study involving 250 Teenagers (male 40%, and female 60%) with age between 13 to 19 years. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to participants. The study lasted for a period of 2 months. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 25.0 and $p < 0.05$ was significant. The results revealed that 48% of the participants were between 14 to 17 years old, 40% male and female 60%, 80% were urban dwellers, 72% were in post-secondary, 60% live with parents/guardians, 92% used social media, 30% used WhatsApp, 72% spent >4 hrs using social media, and 72% agreed that excessive use of social media negatively influence the adolescents.

Keywords: Influence, Social media, Adolescent, Behaviour.

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INTRODUCTION

Some studies suggest social media can facilitate social connection, peer support, and access to information. Social media platforms allow adolescents to maintain relationships, share experiences, and seek help from peers. These interactions can foster feelings of belonging and support during transitional life stages (Alluhidan *et al.*, 2024). Adolescents use social media to express themselves, showcase talents, and explore interests, which can contribute to personal development and skill acquisition. This includes creative contributions and participation in communities with shared interests (Alluhidan *et al.*, 2024). Studies show associations between excess social media use and difficulties in emotional regulation and self-esteem among adolescents. Excessive exposure can exacerbate emotional vulnerability, especially among youth with

pre-existing conditions (Ifedayo Tunde, 2024). The amplification of peer norms and social desirability on social media can elevate participation in risky behaviours, including substance use, unhealthy body image practices, and unsafe online interactions (Chung *et al.*, 2021). Adolescents may engage in frequent social comparison on social media, leading to diminished self-worth, heightened insecurity, and an increased risk of negative behavioural outcomes (Alluhidan *et al.*, 2024).

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This was a cross-sectional study involving 250 Teenagers (male 40%, and female 60%) with age between 13 to 19 years. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to participants. The study lasted for a period of 2 months. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 25.0 and $p < 0.05$ was significant.

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RESULTS

The results revealed that 48% of the participants were between 14 to 17 years old (Table 1), 40% male and female 60% (Table 2), 80% were urban dwellers (Table 3), 72% were in post-secondary (Table 4), 60% live with

parents/guardians (Table 5), 92% used social media (Table 6), 30% used WhatsApp (Table 7), 72% spent >4hrs using social media (Table 8), and 72% agreed that excessive use of social media negatively influence the adolescents (Table 9).

Table 1: Age Distribution of Participants

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
10-13 years	50	20.00
14-17 years	120	48.00
18-19 years	70	28.00
Total	250	100

Table 2: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	100	40.00
Female	150	60.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 3: Place of Residence Distribution of Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Urban	200	80.00
Rural	50	20.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 4: Educational Levels of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	20	8.00
Secondary	50	20.00
Post secondary	180	72.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 5: Living Arrangement of Respondents

Living	Frequency	Percentage (%)
With parents/guardian	150	60.00
With relations	70	28.00
Others	30	12.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 6: Social media usage

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Participants who use social media	230	92.00
Participants who do not use social media	20	8.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 7: Platforms commonly used

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Instagram	31	12.40
Facebook	57	22.80
Tiktok	45	18.00
Snapchat	25	10.00
Whatsapp	77	30.80
Others	15	6
Total	250	100.0

Table 8: Average time spent on social media per day

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 hr	10	4.00
1-2 hrs	20	8.00
3-4 hrs	40	16.00
>4 hrs	180	72.00
Total	250	100.0

Table 9: Excessive social media use may negatively affect emotional well-being

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	180	72.00
Disagree	50	20.00
Not sure	20	8.00
Total	250	100.0

DISCUSSION

The influence of social media on adolescent behaviour is significant because adolescence is a critical stage of emotional, social, and cognitive development. Social media can have both positive effects including social connection, learning and awareness and identity formation and negative effects such as addiction and time management problems, cyberbullying and peer pressure and risky behaviour on young people. Social media has become central to adolescent life globally, offering platforms for communication, identity exploration, information gathering, peer interaction, and entertainment. Adolescence defined approximately as ages 10–19 is a critical developmental stage where behaviour, self-concept, emotional regulation, and social cognition are particularly sensitive to environmental influences such as peer groups and media exposure. Research on the influence of social media on adolescent behaviour has increased significantly over the past decade, revealing both positive and negative outcomes that interact with cognitive, emotional, and social processes.

Adolescence represents a formative period of identity development, social learning, and behaviour acquisition. With rapid growth in internet connectivity, Nigerian adolescents particularly those in the South-South region — are increasingly using social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter for communication, socialisation, entertainment, and information exchange. Although these platforms provide novel opportunities for social connection and learning globally, research suggests both positive and negative behavioural outcomes associated with adolescent social media use. Adolescent behaviour refers to the patterns of actions, emotions, and attitudes shown by individuals during adolescence, the stage between childhood and adulthood (usually ages 10–19 years). This period is marked by rapid physical, emotional, social, and psychological changes, which strongly influence behaviour.

Social media promotes comparisons with peers and idealized images, which can distort self-evaluation

and heighten sensitivity to social approval. Adolescents, still developing critical cognitive skills, are especially prone to internalising unrealistic standards portrayed online.

The study revealed that majority (48%) of the participants were between 14 to 17 years of age and this is the peak age for adolescent social media use. This stage is marked by heightened emotional sensitivity and peer influence. Social media offers opportunities for connection and learning, excessive or unguided use during this peak period can negatively affect psychological well-being, academic focus, and behaviour. Balanced use, parental guidance, and digital literacy education are essential to mitigate risks and maximize benefits. Again, the study revealed that female uses social media than their male counter part and this agreed with previous studies. Females generally use social media more than males, particularly for social interaction and self-expression, while males use it more for entertainment and information. These differences have important psychological, social, and behavioural implications.

Also, the research shows that majority (80%) participants were urban dwellers. Urban living has a strong influence on how people use social media due to better internet infrastructure, affordable data plans, and wider smartphone access than rural dwellers. Urban dwellers tend to use social media more frequently, strategically, and diversely than rural populations. It enhances connectivity, opportunity, and civic engagement, it also amplifies stress, comparison, and inequality. Also, the study shows most the participants in their post-secondary level of education.

These set of students are among the most active social media users. They use platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, X, and LinkedIn are deeply embedded in daily routines for communication with peers and lecturers, entertainment and stress relief, and information sharing and news consumption. Most of the participants stayed with their parents/guardians and this is probably why they use social media. This may be that their parents not monitoring their activity. Majority

(92%) of the participants used social media and they spent more than 4 hours in using social media. The use may be for multiple interconnected reasons related to their academic, social, and personal lives. Again, 72% of the participants agreed that excessive use of social media negatively influence the adolescents.

Excessive use of social media may negatively influence adolescents in several interrelated ways, affecting their mental health, academic performance, social skills, and overall development. This negative influence as a result of excessive use of social media by adolescents include psychological (anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem due to social comparison), social (strong influence of peer pressure and online social norms and Increased exposure to cyberbullying and online harassment), and behavioural implication (adoption of behaviours, fashion, and lifestyles promoted by influencers. altered sleep patterns due to late-night social media use). These negative influences as a result of constant/excessive use of social media affects mental health issues. Excessive use is linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and loneliness. Constant comparison with idealized online images may lead to body image issues. It led to cyberbullying where online harassment may cause emotional distress, fear, and social withdrawal. This social media use may also lead to addiction and time management problems. However, social media use may have positive influence such as social connection, identity formation, earning and awareness and support networks.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that majority of the participants used social media and this social media exerts multifaceted influences on adolescent behaviour, encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioural domains. While providing opportunities for connection, self-expression, and peer support, social media also poses challenges related to emotional regulation, peer pressure, self-esteem, and behavioural patterns. Importantly, individual differences such as emotional intelligence and self-concept clarity and the nature of social media engagement shape outcomes significantly.

Social media strongly shapes adolescent behaviour by influencing how they think, feel, and interact with others. While it offers opportunities for learning and connection, excessive or unregulated use may harm mental health and social development. Guidance from parents, educators, and self-awareness among adolescents is essential to ensure healthy and balanced use.

Adolescent behaviour is shaped by biological changes, social interactions, and psychological development. Although this stage can be challenging, it is also a crucial period for growth, learning, and personality development. Proper guidance and support help adolescents develop positive behaviour and responsible decision-making.

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge Nazor Barinua-Gbaranor, Nuazor Victory Barinua, Kedumle Success Barinua, Tuamene Excellent Barinua and Excellent Support Global Foundation for their moral support, prayers, understanding, and encouragement during the period of this research.

Funding: No funding

Conflict of Interest: None declared

Ethical Approval: Not required

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