| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Media Psychology In Human Development: Rethinking The Place Of Social Media Usage Among Teenage Girls In Port Harcourt

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| ABSTRACT

Given the rapid evolution of social media since the early 2000s, society has witnessed paradigm shifts in all spheres of life including psychological development. This study examines the impact of social media interaction on the psychological development of teenage girls in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. It explores how social media consumption influences cognition, socialization, self-esteem, body image, and interpersonal relationships and by applying a comprehensive analysis of developmental and social psychology frameworks to adolescent behavioural patterns of young women in Port Harcourt argues that social media is an active tool in framing and dislodging relationships currently. As an evidence-based study, it brings to the fore the fact that teenage girls as social media producers and consumers (prosumers) have critical insights on life in today's digital space which highlights both opportunities and potential psychological risks beclouding their social media usage.

| KEYWORDS

Human development, media psychology, social media, teenage-girls

Introduction

The society for media psychology was founded in the 1980's to bring scholars, researchers, practitioners and clinicians together to understand the implications of mediated communications and the increasing integration of media technologies across society (Giles 2003). Knowing that media is a powerful influencer of human behavior and observing the rate at which new social media apps are growing, one would readily agree that the concept of media Psychology came at a time it is mostly needed. It would not also be wrong to wonder at why two unrelated disciplines are brought together to form a whole. The putting together of media and psychology to form a discipline is completely appreciable because both are in constant and high relationship with humans. What is meant by this is that humans interact heavily with media and at the same time are deeply related with psychology since psychology studies behaviour. Therefore, the relationship between media and psychology is their connection with man and woman. For the purpose of this work, Gahlowt's definition of media psychology fits well and would be adopted. This is what he has to say; 'Media in media psychology stands for "mediated experience". The mediation can happen through all forms of print, electronic and news media. Media psychology is the study of how people perceive, understand, respond and interact in the media saturated world of today. People are not just passive consumers of media but are active participants, producers and distributors of media content as well' (Gahlowt 2016 p.8). For Gahlowt, people are active participants, taking part in the entire process of encoding, decoding and distributing media contents. This type of participation is what plays out in

social media interaction especially among teenage girls and it is for this that this study chose to adopt this definition. This choice is not a way of seeing this definition as comprehensive because the scope of media psychology is not only in the message rather it continues to evolve as new media emerge. This is why Rutledge opines that;

> There is no consensus among academicians and practitioners as to the scope of media psychology. This is because the field must be representative of not only the work currently being done but also the work that needs to be done. This is a field that changes every time iTunes releases a new mobile app or a new social media platform appears. The interests of the person doing the defining often drive definitions of a field. However, the fact that both 'media' and 'psychology' are themselves broad and prone to misconception contributes to the definitional confusion. In spite of our awareness of media everywhere, when someone mentions media the metaphor we fall back on is often mass media. It's a field where you must continually define your terms. Does 'media' mean television or does 'media' include computer interfaces that facilitate information management and distribution? (Rutledge 2010).

The choice of Gahlowt's definition therefore, is an agreement that Media psychology in simple terms means using psychological theories to understand what we do with the media content and what the media content does with us in our everyday life. In general terms media psychology is as Rutledge (2013) asserts is the effort to understand the constantly evolving connection between humans and media from a psychological perspective. The type of media in this context is the social media. Social media is a tool kit that houses a number of social communication network apps that make use of the internet and allows its users to produce and consume online contents. What makes it social is the fact that it is attractive and presents a companion for both the bored and the jolly good fellows. Among the apps referred to as social media platforms are such media apps as chat rooms, Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram, instant messenger, myspace, video chats etc. These have gained entrance and position in the society today more in every other age and time and the fact that young people fit into the usage of these apps with no tutorial is fascinating, little wonder, scholars like Prensky (2001) refer to present day set of young generation people as "digital natives" who are born into the computer age, live in an age referred to as the Net generation or the networked society.

Looking at everyday facts therefore, one can say that the social media has become an indispensable part of human existence; hence it has an impactful hand in the development and formation of present generation of teenage girls all over the world. Its impactful presence is there on the behavioral patterns of individuals, their cognition of facts and in the emotion of reaction towards issues. In the life of teenage girls who tend to believe almost everything presented to them on social media, the usage of social media interactive apps is not only a challenge but seemingly a risk in parenting. Granted that some may be fixated only on seeing the positive impacts of social media, such as in researching to get answers quickly, browsing to get medical attention online at one's convenience, the socialization it gives, as well as accessibility in advertising one's products at little or no cost (Akram 2018), yet it goes without saying that a number of deaths has resulted from the use of social media. The thrust of this paper is not only on its positives but also on the dangers the social media pose in the formation of girls in their teens.

Social Media And Psychology In Human Development : An Overview

In the early days of media psychology, after its establishment as Division 46 by the American Psychological Association was focused on training psychologists who appeared in media as expert sources or counselors. It later changed its name to Society for Media Psychology and Technology and shifted its focus to research on the effects and influence of media. This is a welcomed development since we live in a media emerging society. So as new media emerge, study areas should also emerge to checkmate its relevance and or impact in the society. For example, when Facebook was Launched in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg, no one new it was just the preamble, Reddit followed and was launched in 2005 by Massachusetts Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian then Twitter came founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone, and others as a microblogging site. After four years Instagram came on board founded in 2010 by Stanford graduate Kevin Systrom as a photo-sharing site and purchased by Facebook in 2012 followed by Pinterest Founded in 2010 by iPhone app developer Ben Silbermann as a visual "pin board". Then Snapchat appeared founded in 2011 by a trio of Stanford students — Evan Spiegel, Reggie Brown, and Bobby Murphy and then TikTok came on board Founded in 2016 by Chinese tech company.

The above mentioned are social media. The rapid evolution of social media since the early 2000s has fundamentally transformed human communication, interaction, and psychological development, particularly among adolescents. As digital platforms proliferate, teenage girls have become central figures in this technological landscape, navigating complex digital environments that simultaneously offer unprecedented connectivity and potential psychological challenges (Boyd, 2014). This dynamic digital ecosystem has redefined traditional boundaries of social interaction, information consumption, and identity formation, compelling researchers to critically examine the multifaceted impacts of social media on psychological well-being.

Within this context, the research focuses on teenage girls at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, recognizing the unique socio-cultural dimensions of digital engagement in the African context. By employing a systematic literature review, this study seeks to unpack the intricate relationships between social media consumption and psychological development, addressing critical questions about cognition, socialization, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships (Verduyn et al., 2017). The investigation aims not merely to document technological trends but to generate evidence-based insights that can inform digital wellness strategies, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of adolescent development in the digital age.

This is because all of these came with their pros and coins influencing the entire human society. Although these social media have come to better the lot of man, it is not without negativities. Media Psychology is here to help man make the most of these media and to reduce its negative effects. Hence the influence of the social media from childhood to old adulthood cannot be overlooked because they shape our thought patterns, attitudes and behaviour. Study shows that smartphone exposure and media multitasking (MMT) were associated with higher cognitive inflexibility, suggesting that the digital environment may adversely impact youth's ability to smoothly shift between tasks. (Sina, Buck, Ahrens, Coumans, Eiben, Formisano, Lissner, Mazur, Michels, Molnar, Moreno, Pala, Pohlabeln, Reisch, Tornaritis, Veidebaum, Hebestreit, & I. Family consortium 2023). On the positive, the exposure it gives especially through online contents can impart cognitive development Anderson & Subrahmanyam (2017) cited in Sina et al (2023) by aiding one to develop language skills, spatial reasoning and other entrepreneurial skills. Media connect people worldwide

and therefore can be said to have a significant impact on social development both positively and negatively since it aids interaction not only between relatives but also provides a platform that creates and nurtures friendships/relationships. At the same time, as Sina et al claims it displaces (real-life) social interactions such as parent–child, sibling- or peer relationships. This displacement or interference is often known as technoference. Social interactions are crucial for a healthy development because they build the foundation of processes related with personality and cognitive development, such as emotion regulation (Pempek & Laurecela 2017).

The interference of digital media with parent–child interactions may compete with children's ability to concentrate and regulate their emotions; this of course may lead to some sort of emotional risks. Man and woman is naturally an emotional being and media can evoke a variety of emotion thereby contributing to the emotional development of a person. This is to say that one can learn a lot about emotion and how to cope with them through the media.

In a nut shell, the role media and psychology play in human development is unquantifiable as it can be seen in the shaping of thoughts, actions and real-life interactions. From a psychological point of view and borrowing from relevant literature reviewed, it is obvious that media influences cognitive development, social development, identity formation, body image and overall emotional well-being. Its influence is bifurcated hence, media can impact positively or negatively on cognition, socialization and emotion depending on the usage, content, demography and hours spent on it.

Impact of Social Media on Teenage Girls' Psychosocial Development

More often than not people tend to use growth and development as synonymous but that is not very correct. Development is quite different from growth. Growth is simply addition in size and shape. Even the English dictionary notes the difference when it defines growth as 'increases in number, value or strength whereas it defines 'develop' as the 'change with a specific direction, progress.' The Encyclopedia Britannica defines development as "the progressive change in size, shape and function during the life of an organism by which its genetic potentials are translated into functioning adult system". For this definition development includes changes in cognition, emotion and behaviour from infancy to adulthood. In other words, it accepts the developmental psychologist's stand on the stages of human development especially that of Erikson. In support of this definition, Crow and Crow (1965) see development as concerned with growth as well as those changes in behaviour which results from environmental situation. His definition also tells that environment is a key factor in developmental process.

Aware of the fact that growth is different from development, our focus here is to understand development in teenagers. On a general note, every living thing develops with each passing day either as a result of formation or nature taking its course. This development may be either physical, cognitive, social or personality development according to Development Psychologists. Physical development of the young adults refers to his/her weight, size, shape and other seen signs of puberty, one can easily get a number of young adults designing their bodies with tattoos they know nothing about, a culture learnt from the social media. The next is cognitive development which means logical nature of the individual which is the basis of social media influence, once their logical ability is cut up in fantasy, it turns anti-clock wise. The social and personality aspect of development refers to how an individual interacts with the society and his immediate environment. And this is largely influence by the social media too. So, the three aspects of development as psychology would have it, are all at the danger of social media influence. The social and personality formation and development of teenagers is posed with risks arising from their consumption of social media contents where they are prone to fandom of wrong 'mirrors', thereby picking fake and 'unideal' models. Being fans of the social media and some characters therein, they build their personality around it, sometimes ignoring societal ethics and morals.

More often than not, as fans of these modern trends, they live out the life of the social media and as Sullivan (2013) puts it, they reinterpret media content and create their own cultural productions in response to what they get from the media. According to him, … concern has also been raised about the inability of fans to separate the fantasy of media text from the reality of their everyday lives. Note that some of the characters they tend to take as models are very far from reality. They present a 'good life', a kind of life this work would like to term 'media packaging'. They characterize happy living whereas their lives are full of anxiety and regrets maybe as a result of their lifestyles. They borrow neat cloths and take a picture close to someone's car and tag it "my boo gave me a surprising birthday present" and the innocent young girl feels her God-given fiancé is counterfeit. The female teens grow into believing that their male counterparts as responsible for their wellbeing. More often than not what they see and their interaction in the social media with peers give them a feeling that they are not anywhere close to success and that is where low self-esteem and depression come in. these wrong patterns of personality development can be avoided if social media consumption is put to check.

As teens Erikson (1998) rightly puts it, in his psychosocial development, between the ages of twelve (12) and (19) otherwise known as the adolescent years comes what he termed the stage of "identity versus role confusion". For him, at this stage individuals are preoccupied with finding who they are and where they are going. Individuals at this stage usually trust their imagination. They are face with many new roles and if such roles are explored in a healthy manner, positive identity will be achieved but if otherwise role confusion will occur. By role, Erikson means that at this stage, adolescents look forward to getting a model, one they can look to as they are forming their personality. This is when they decide who they want to be and how they want to spend the rest of their lives. Since it is at this stage that individuals find a sense of personal identity, the immediate has a big role to play, apart from the immediate environment, friends, social groups, school mates, age mates, and societal trends also have a hand in shaping and forming an identity and that is where social media interaction come in. Those who pass this stage successfully enter their next stage of development without fixation.

Notice that Erikson points out that there may be role confusion. This is the lot of those who did not pass the stage well, the face with what Erik calls role confusion. They are not sure who they are, what they want and they are usually confused about their place in life. Erik's role confusion can also be said to come in place when an individual at this identity versus role confusion stage is not sure who he/she wants to be and whose lifestyle they want to follow. This confusion can be more seen, in present day's society where adolescents are saturated with information overload. They see in the visuals they consume, people they take as role models in their day-to-day affair in both their physical and virtual environments therefore today's adolescents are faced with the question of Quo Vadis

Theoretical Framework

Developmental psychology provides a critical lens for understanding social media's impact on teenage psychological growth, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between individual cognitive processes and technological environments. Erikson's identity development theory (Erikson and Erikson 1998) offers theoretical foundations for examining how digital platforms mediate adolescent experiences, identity formation, and social learning. These frameworks suggest that social media represents more than a communication tool. it is a complex developmental context that significantly influences psychological maturation. Social psychology complements developmental perspectives by illuminating how digital interactions shape interpersonal dynamics, self-perception,

and group membership. Theories of social comparison, self-presentation, and impression management become particularly relevant in understanding teenage girls' online behaviors. Contemporary research indicates that social media platforms create unique social environments where traditional social hierarchies are reconstructed, and identity negotiations occur through complex digital performativity.

The prosumer theory emerges as a pivotal conceptual framework, recognizing persons not merely as passive consumers but active producers (Du Plessis, 2019) of digital content and meaning. This perspective challenges traditional media consumption models by highlighting adolescents' agency in creating, curating, and interpreting social media experiences. Within this theoretical landscape, social media becomes a dynamic space of psychological negotiation, where individual agency, technological affordances, and sociocultural contexts continuously interact and reshape adolescent development.

Social Media Networks and The Psychology Of Teenagers

Social media networks and their impacts in the formation of individual personalities cannot be overemphasized. The BBC news research of 2013, as cited in Shabnoor and Tajinder (2016), reveals that 67% of Facebook users and other well-known social media portals consist of youths and young students. This demographic dominance illustrates the significant role social media plays in shaping teenage psychological development, particularly in how teenagers construct and maintain their social identities online. For teenage girls specifically, social media networks serve as platforms for self-expression, social comparison, and identity formation. These digital spaces become crucial environments where young people explore who they are, connect with peers, and develop their sense of self. The constant interaction with social media content affects their psychological well-being in various ways, from influencing their self-esteem and body image to shaping their understanding of social relationships and success. The immediacy of feedback through likes, comments and shares creates a continuous cycle of validation-seeking behavior that can significantly impact their emotional development. The psychological impact of social media usage among teenagers manifests in their daily behaviors, thought patterns, and social interactions. As digital natives, their engagement with these platforms go beyond mere communication - it becomes an integral part of their developmental process. This integration of social media into teenage life creates new challenges for understanding adolescent psychology, particularly in how young people navigate between their online and offline identities, manage digital relationships, and develop emotional resilience in an increasingly connected world. For teenage girls especially, these platforms can simultaneously serve as sources of empowerment and vulnerability, highlighting the need for balanced and mindful engagement with social media networks.

Empirical Review

This study employs a systematic review of literature published between 2000-2024, focusing on peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and validated research reports. The selection criteria prioritized studies examining social media's impact on teenage girls' psychological development, with particular attention to works relevant to the Nigerian university context. According to Bibire 2020 who studied social networking sites usage on the psychological well-being of undergraduates in Nigerian Universities using descriptive survey design and stratified sampling technique in six 6 universities, there is a significant effect of social networking sites usage on undergraduates' Psychological well-being, moral well-being, social well-being, intellectual well-being and emotional well-being. Based on his findings, Bibire recommended that social networking sites should be properly used by undergraduates in order to enhance their psychological wellbeing. The scholars finding clearly unveils the positivity of new/social media without pointing at the negative effects.

Shifting away from Bibire's standpoint, Nwokwu, Nwankwo and Nwafor conducted research on social media use pattern and the image implication among university undergraduate students in South East, Nigeria. Amongts other findings, their research found that irresponsibility in social media use among the students is as a result of their unawareness that it is injurious to their online reputations, and that, the level of irresponsibility in social media use among the students is dependent on the lack of social media education in their respective universities. Hence, their research suggests that the online reputations of many social media users among the undergraduate students of universities in South-East, Nigeria may have been dented as a result of indecent/ irresponsibility in social media usage.

For them, this is because, universities in South-East, Nigeria may have not risen to the challenge of sensitizing and conscientizing their undergraduate students on the negative implications of indecency/irresponsibility in social media use. They argue that if not watched, social media usage may jeopardize the chances of some potential graduates in terms of being selected for international scholarship awards, oversea postgraduate admission, employment in international and even local organizations, etc. These scholars unlike Bibire attempt to disclose some dangers of social media usage in their own way although laying the blame on ignorance and lack of social media education. Similarly, a study on heavy social media use and psychological distress among adolescents: the moderating role of sex, age, and parental support was conducted in 2023 by Mougharbel, Chaput, Sampasa-Kanyinga, Hamilton, Colman, Leatherdale, and Goldfield. The scholars got data from a representative sample of middle and high school students in Ontario, Canada. Cross-sectional analyses included 6,822 students derived from the 2019 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey. Their results showed that 48% of adolescents used social media for 3 h or more per day, and 43.7% had moderate to severe psychological distress, with a higher prevalence among females (54%) than males (31%). After adjustment for relevant covariates, heavy social media use ($\geq$3 h/day) was associated with increased odds of severe psychological distress [odds ratio (OR): 2.01; 95% confidence interval (CI):1.59–2.55]. The association of social media use with psychological distress was modified by age ($p < 0.05$) but not sex or parental support. The association was stronger among younger adolescents. Hence, they concluded that heavy social media use is associated with higher levels of psychological distress, with younger adolescents being the most vulnerable. This study tells clearly some of the down sides of social media usage including severe psychological distress. In the same vein, Studies by Twenge and Campbell (2019) demonstrate that digital platforms fundamentally alter attention mechanisms, multitasking capabilities, and critical thinking patterns among teenage girls. This clearly points that social media usage has significant influence in development.

Findings

The literatures reviewed in this research reveal significant transformations in adolescent information processing through social media interactions.
Social development analyses highlight the complex dynamics of interpersonal relationships in digital environments. Research by Boyd (2014) and Livingstone (2017) as cited earlier emphasizes that social media platforms create novel socialization spaces where identity formation, peer interactions, and social capital are continuously negotiated. These digital interactions introduce nuanced communication strategies, emotional intelligence development and alternative mechanisms for social belonging that diverge from traditional face-to-face interactions.

Psychological impacts of social media on teenage girls encompass multifaceted dimensions of emotional and self-perception experiences. Woods and Scott's (2016) seminal research demonstrate correlations between social media usage and psychological variables such as self-esteem, body image perceptions, and emotional regulation. Verduyn et al. (2017) also cited earlier further illuminate how digital platforms simultaneously offer opportunities for self-expression and potential psychological vulnerabilities, creating a complex landscape of emotional and developmental challenges. Borrowing from the above studies therefore, this present work agues that social media can be said to have significant influence on self-concept development, academic achievement, anxiety and depression among heavy social media users, particularly related to body image and social comparison

Conclusion

While social media presents unprecedented opportunities for learning, connection, and self-expression, it also poses significant challenges to healthy psychological development. The findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that acknowledges both the benefits and risks of social media interaction. The unique context of Nigerian university life, combined with the global digital landscape, creates specific challenges and opportunities for teenage girls' development. Success in navigating this complex environment requires a collaborative effort between educational institutions, mental health professionals, and students themselves. Looking forward, the integration of cultural sensitivity with digital literacy will be crucial in fostering healthy social media engagement among teenage girls. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on media psychology and adolescent development, while also providing practical for educational policy and mental health intervention strategies. Future research should continue to explore the evolving relationship between social media and psychological development, particularly in diverse cultural contexts like Nigerian universities.

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