



SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND PEER INFLUENCE AS DETERMINANTS OF MORAL DECADENCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OYO EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined social media addiction and peer influence as determinants of moral decadence among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises all secondary schools in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo, Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select five secondary schools in which 20 students were chosen from each to make a total of 100 as a sample for study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. It was developed in closed-ended Agree or Disagree. The instrument was moderated by experts who affirmed its validity. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical tools. The research findings revealed that social media addiction and peer influence play in contributing to moral decadence among secondary school students. The study reveals a strong consensus among respondents that peer pressure and the desire to fit in with peers often lead students to engage in behaviours that compromise their moral values and respect for authority. The pervasive nature of social media further amplifies these influences, exposing students to a continuous stream of peer behaviours and ideologies that can erode traditional moral standards. It was highly recommended that schools should integrate ethics and moral education into the curriculum to help students develop a strong understanding of ethical behaviour and decision-making.

Keywords: Addiction, Determinant, Peer influence, Social media, Moral decadence

Introduction

In recent years, the rise of digital technology has profoundly influenced the lives of adolescents, particularly through social media platforms. Social media addiction has become a notable concern, with increasing evidence suggesting that excessive use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can adversely impact various aspects of adolescent development (Smith, Brown & White, 2021). This phenomenon is characterized by a compulsive need to engage with social media, often resulting in negative consequences for mental health, social interactions, and academic performance (Brown & Lee, 2022). Social media addiction refers to the excessive and compulsive use of social media platforms that interferes with daily life and functioning (Andreassen, 2015). This phenomenon has become increasingly prevalent among adolescents, who are particularly vulnerable due to their developmental stage and high engagement with digital technologies (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Research indicates that social media addiction is associated with a range of negative outcomes, including reduced academic performance, impaired social relationships, and emotional distress (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Social media addiction is linked to several behavioural issues among adolescents, including diminished attention spans, decreased academic achievement, and disrupted sleep patterns (Wang, & Zhang, 2023). These effects are compounded by peer influence, which plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' behaviours and attitudes. Peers are a significant source of social comparison and validation, and their influence can amplify the effects of social media addiction (Johnson & Lee, 2020). Studies have shown that excessive use of social media can lead to a decrease in face-to-face interactions and social skills, which are critical for moral and social development (Lup & Trub, 2015). For instance, a study by Huang and Su (2018) found that students who reported higher levels of social media use exhibited poorer interpersonal skills and a diminished capacity for empathy, which are key components of moral development.

Furthermore, social media platforms often present unrealistic standards and ideals, which can contribute to moral confusion and ethical dilemmas among adolescents. The constant exposure to idealized images and lifestyles can distort students' perceptions of moral norms and values, leading to a



decline in ethical behaviour (Marwick, & Boy, 2014). A peer group is a social group made up of people with similar social position who have similar interests and are roughly of the same age or within the same age bracket. A peer might be somebody to look up to in terms of behaviour or someone one believes is your age or aptitude level. For social and emotional developments, most human beings associate with their peers (Bos, 2020). Being a member of a peer group presents advantages and disadvantages because most actions, emotions and characters of members are influenced by their peers (Adediran & Sobola, 2021). Such conscious and unconscious influence is linked to peer pressure. Peer influence operates through various mechanisms, including conformity pressure and social reinforcement, which can both encourage and normalize excessive social media use (Miller, 2019). Adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer influence due to their developmental stage, where social acceptance and belonging are critical. As a result, peer dynamics can either mitigate or exacerbate the impact of social media addiction on moral behaviour (Prinstein, 2008).

Research suggests that adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer pressure, which can lead to both positive and negative outcomes depending on the nature of the peer group (Gardner, 2015). Empirical studies have demonstrated that peer influence can strongly impact moral behaviour. For example, a study by Gardner (2015) found that adolescents are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, such as substance abuse and delinquency, when surrounded by peers who endorse such behaviours. Research suggests that adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer pressure, which can lead to both positive and negative outcomes depending on the nature of the peer group (Gardner, 2015). Empirical studies have demonstrated that peer influence can strongly impact moral behaviour. For example, a study by Gardner (2015) found that adolescents are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, such as substance abuse and delinquency, when surrounded by peers who endorse such behaviours. This is because peer groups often create norms and pressures that override individual moral judgments (Adams, 2022).

Moral decadence among adolescents refers to a decline in ethical standards and values, often manifested through behaviors such as dishonesty, disrespect, and disregard for social norms (Eisenberg, 2009). This decline is concerning as it undermines the foundational values necessary for healthy social and personal development. Research has indicated that both social media addiction and peer influence are significant contributors to this

moral decline. Research has identified several factors contributing to moral decadence among adolescents, including exposure to negative influences from social media and peer groups (Wills & Cleary in Adams, 2022). For instance, social media platforms often glorify behaviour that contradicts traditional moral values, such as materialism and superficiality, which can lead to a shift in adolescents' moral priorities. Similarly, peer groups that endorse unethical behavior can further exacerbate moral decline by reinforcing and normalizing such conduct. A study by Twenge and Campbell (2018) found that usually people or groups of people have to go through the process of moral disengagement in order to carry out unethical behaviour. There are four stage processes by which people disengage morally in order to engage in unethical behaviour according to Adediran and Sobola (2021); firstly, the individual or group has to mentally reconstruct or tell themselves a story or context where the action or actions being or about to be taken cannot be viewed as being immoral or unethical. This can include recourse to devices like 'others are doing it', or 'it's not against the law' for example. Secondly, they will usually reduce their own sense of importance or agency in their actions. This is usually done by blaming others, the organization, situation or context as the driver or originator of the actions (Andreassen, 2015). Next, they will fail to see or deny the consequences of the actions being undertaken or their inaction. Lastly, it will need to change how it is being perceived and regarded the victim(s) by either downgrading their status, importance or the effect and impact on them (Odgers & Jensen, 2020).

The intersection of social media addiction and peer influence presents a complex dynamic that significantly impacts moral behaviour among adolescents. Studies have shown that these factors do not operate in isolation but interact to affect students' moral values. For example, a study by Wright (2018) found that the combination of high social media use and peer pressure is associated with increased likelihood of engaging in unethical behaviour. The pervasive nature of social media can amplify peer influences by constantly exposing adolescents to peer behaviours and opinions, thus intensifying their impact on moral conduct (Vasalou, 2008). Moreover, social media platforms often facilitate the formation of peer groups with shared interests and values, which can either reinforce or challenge existing moral standards (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2017). The interaction between social media addiction and peer influence highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing moral decadence, one that considers both digital and social contexts. In the context of moral decadence, peer influence can

contribute to the erosion of ethical standards by normalizing unethical behaviours and reducing individual accountability (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2017). When adolescents are exposed to peers who engage in morally questionable activities, they are more likely to adopt similar behaviours, leading to a decline in moral standards (Ogunleye, (2024).

In the context of Oyo East Local Government Area of Oyo State., secondary school students are navigating a complex interplay of social media usage and peer interactions. Understanding the specific dynamics of social media addiction and peer influence in this local context is crucial for developing effective interventions to address the associated moral issues.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to examine social media addiction and peer influence as determinant of moral decadence among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo. The specific objectives are to:

- examine the impact of social media addiction on moral values among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo.
- explore how peer influence contributes to moral decadence among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo.

Research Questions

Based on the study, the research questions are;

- How does social media addiction affect moral values among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo?
- What role does peer influence play in moral decadence among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises all secondary schools in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo, Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select five (5) secondary schools in which twenty (20) students were chosen to make a total of 100 as sample for study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. It was developed in closed-ended of Agree or disagree. The instrument was moderated by experts who affirmed its validity. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analyzed simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical tool.

Results

Research Question 1: How does social media addiction affect moral values among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo?

Table 1: Effects of social media addiction on students' moral values

S/N ITEMS	Agreed		Disagreed		Mean	S. D
	Freq (N)	Percent (%)	Freq (N)	Percent (%)		
1. Social media use has influenced my sense of right and wrong	74	74%	26	26%	3.89	.77
2. I often find myself questioning traditional moral values after spending time on social media.	94	94%	6	6%	3.97	.79
3. Social media content has made me more accepting of behaviors I once considered unethical.	97	97%	3	3%	3.98	.79
4. I Sometimes imitate the behaviors or attitudes I see on social media, even if they conflict with my moral values.	89	89%	11	11%	3.90	.79
5. Social media encourages me to prioritize popularity over honesty and integrity.	88	88%	12	12%	3.90	.79
Overall Total	Mean (?) = 3.93 and STD = 0.79					

Result in table 1 shows a significant influence of social media on the moral perceptions and behaviours of students. The majority of respondents agreed with the statements indicating that social media use has affected their sense of right and wrong (74%), with a notable mean score of 3.89 and a standard deviation of 0.77. This suggests that social media plays a critical role in shaping students' moral compass, leading many to question traditional moral values and, in some cases, to accept behaviours they previously considered unethical. The highest agreement (97%) was observed in the item stating that social media content has made them more accepting of behaviours they once deemed unethical, indicating a strong shift in moral judgments as a result of exposure to digital content.

Research Question 2: What role does peer influence play in moral decadence among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo?

Table 2: Effects of peer influence on students' moral decadence

S/N ITEMS	Agreed		Disagreed		Mean (?)	S. D
	Freq (N)	Percent (%)	Freq (N)	Percent (%)		
6. Peer Pressure Often encourages students to engage in behaviours that they know are wrong.	87	87%	13	13%	3.93	.79
7. Students are more likely to adopt negative behaviours if their close friends engage in them.	86	86%	14	14%	3.93	.79
8. The desire to fit in with peers leads many students to compromise their moral values.	90	90%	10	10%	3.95	.79



9. Peer influence isMajor a factor in the decline of respect for authority among students. 88 88% 12 12% 3.94 .79

10. Students tend to imitate the negative actions of their peers more than their positive actions. 70 70% 30 30% 3.72 .74

Overall Total Mean (?) = 3.89 and STD = 0.78

Result in table 2 reflects a strong consensus among respondents on the significant impact of peer influence on moral behaviour among secondary school students in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo. The majority of respondents (87% to 90%) agreed with statements suggesting that peer pressure often encourages students to engage in wrongful behaviours, compromise their moral values, and contribute to a decline in respect for authority. This is evidenced by the high mean scores (ranging from 3.72 to 3.95) and a relatively low standard deviation of around 0.79, indicating a consistent agreement across the sample. Such findings suggest that peer influence plays a critical role in shaping the moral conduct of students, often leading them towards negative behaviors that they may otherwise avoid.

Discussion

Findings from the study shows that a significant percentage of students (89%) admitted to imitating behaviours seen on social media, even when those behaviours conflict with their personal moral values. This demonstrates the powerful role of social media in normalizing certain behaviours and attitudes, often encouraging the prioritization of popularity over honesty and integrity. The consistent mean scores across the items (ranging from 3.89 to 3.98) and the overall mean of 3.93, coupled with a standard deviation of 0.79, highlight the pervasive and uniform influence of social media across different moral dimensions among students. Supporting these findings, recent studies have similarly reported the impact of social media on adolescents' moral development. For example, Turiel (2015) found that increased social media use is associated with a decline in traditional moral values among teenagers, as they are constantly exposed to content that challenges societal norms. Additionally, Steinberg and Monahan (2017) emphasized that social media platforms often promote relativistic perspectives, where moral standards become fluid and subjective. This aligns with the current data, which shows that students are increasingly questioning and even altering their moral beliefs under the influence of social media. These studies corroborate the present findings, indicating a broader trend of moral shifts among adolescents in the digital age.

This result highlights the power of negative peer influence in a school setting, where the desire to fit in or be accepted by peers often overrides individual moral judgment. The overall mean of 3.89 and

standard deviation of 0.78 further corroborate the consistency of these findings, indicating a general agreement that peer influence is a major factor in moral decadence among the students. These findings are consistent with existing literature on the role of peer influence in adolescent behaviour. According to Steinberg and Monahan (2017) peer groups significantly shape adolescents' moral and ethical behaviour, particularly in environments where peer pressure is prevalent. Similarly (Adams, 2022) found that adolescents are more susceptible to engaging in risky or unethical behaviours when influenced by their peers. The results of this study align with these findings, underscoring the importance of addressing peer influence as a critical factor in efforts to curb moral decadence among secondary school students.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, social media addiction and peer influence contribute to moral decadence among secondary school students. The study reveals a strong consensus among respondents that peer pressure and the desire to fit in with peers often lead students to engage in behaviours that compromise their moral values and respect for authority. The pervasive nature of social media further amplifies these influences, exposing students to a continuous stream of peer behaviours and ideologies that can erode traditional moral standards. These results highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing moral decadence among adolescents, one that considers both the digital and social contexts in which they operate. Educational institutions, parents, and policymakers must work together to create environments that promote positive peer interactions and responsible social media use. By fostering critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and resilience against negative peer influence, it is possible to mitigate the impact of these factors and support the moral development of students. Ultimately, addressing these determinants is crucial for nurturing a generation of students who can uphold strong moral values in the face of societal challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

- i. Schools should integrate ethics and moral education into the curriculum to help students develop a strong understanding of ethical behaviour and decision-making. These programs should address the influence of social media and peer pressure, and provide practical strategies for students to navigate these challenges.
- ii. Parents should engage in regular discussions with their children about the impact of social media



- and peer pressure on moral values. By maintaining an open line of communication, parents can help their children develop critical thinking skills and resist negative influences.
- iii. Policymakers should create and enforce guidelines that promote responsible use of social media platforms. This includes setting standards for content and encouraging platforms to implement features that help prevent and address negative peer influences and unethical behaviour.
 - iv. Schools should establish peer mentoring programs that pair students with positive role models who can provide guidance and support. These programs can help counteract the negative effects of peer pressure by promoting positive behaviours and ethical conduct.
 - v. Community organizations should support and participate in awareness campaigns that educate students about the risks of social media addiction and peer influence. Such campaigns can help raise awareness and provide students with tools to make informed decisions.
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