

## Effect of Social Media Use on Drug Abuse among Youths in Nigeria: Implications for Youth Education

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### ABSTRACT

Substance abuse has become a major problem at different levels, ranging from personal, national to global levels, and lack of research has set back progress in trying to address this public health concern. It is a major problem because the celebrities and personalities who accept to be used for advertisements or promotions for industries may not understand the long term effect of substance abuse such as depression, queer behaviour, sexual and domestic violence. Meanwhile, substance use is rampant and often glorified by celebrities on social media. There have been reports of social media being used as a strategy for selling drugs, with hashtags facilitating the process of pairing buyers with sellers. As such, it is believed that because celebrities promote drugs and alcohol use on social media sites by making smoking and drinking seem like fun, young people who see such messages are often encouraged to experiment with the same products. Accordingly, social media have become a source of exposure to two different sources of influence associated with youth alcohol use and peer alcohol behaviour and advertizing, with far-reaching effects. This informed this research which aimed to ascertain the effect of social media use on drug abuse, with special focus on the implications for youth education.

**Keywords:** Drug abuse, social media and youths

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### INTRODUCTION

Scholars across different walks of life have defined the term drug from different perspectives based on their discipline and sometimes experience [1,2,3,4,5]. The meaning of the word drug often varies depending on the context in which it is used [6,7,8,9,10]. Regardless of the various definitions, there seems to be an agreement that drug is a chemical substance capable of modifying, altering the mood, physiological and biological composition of the user [11,12,13,14,15]. Drug abuse on the other hand, can be defined as the unwarranted use of a drug in order to achieve a 'high' or for performance enhancement [16,17,18,19]. People who abuse drugs usually don't have a prescription for the drug and abusing drug usually leads to dependency and addiction [20,21]. Thus, the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, among others, has worsened the menace of drug use among young persons [22,23,24,25,26]. This is because, by just pressing a button, one can easily create and simultaneously

share messages to a large and heterogeneous audiences scattered across different geographical locations. However, just like every other human creation, the technology has also come with its attendant disadvantages, one of which is that, on social media, we get more than we bargain because there is information overload [27,28,29,30]. This weakness makes young people the most vulnerable to negative tendencies and influences portrayed on social media. Supporting the above submission, [1] note that social media has great influence on young people because they are tender at heart and could be easily misled. One area where young people could easily be misled is in drug use and abuse [2, 31,32,33]. Studies such as those of [3; 4] have shown that drug abuse commonly arises from ignorance. This could come in the form of use of drugs without medical doctor's prescription, use of alcohol in order to remove fear from the mind during performances or the use of sedative and tranquilizing chemicals. Martin, [5] believe that such substances

usually have long term side effects. Sambo cited by [6] adds that "chronic use of substances can cause serious, sometimes, irreversible damage to adolescents physical and psychological development." Ramo cited in [7] enumerates some of the possible complications of substance abuse to include rape, personality disorder, criminal vices, drug addiction and alcoholism, among others. To abuse drug means to use harmful or hazardous psycho-active substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. This phenomenon according to [6] has gradually become a major public health concern of which all hands must be on deck towards nipping on the bud.

#### **Drug Abuse**

Psychoactive substance abuse refers to the habitual use of drugs not needed for therapeutic purposes, to alter one's mood, or state of consciousness. It is a maladaptive pattern of drug or substance use that can result in social, legal, occupational or physical consequences. The [8] defines drug abuse as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances including alcohol and illicit drugs. On the other hand, substance dependence is the psychological or physical need to continue taking a substance or drug. Psychological dependence is the intermittent and recurrent craving for the substance of abuse while physical dependence refers to the development of tolerance for the substance or the necessity to take substances to prevent the development of withdrawal symptoms. Some common examples of psychoactive substances include alcohol, cocaine, opium, cannabinoids, amphetamines, sedative and hypnotics. Anxiolytics and other stimulants like caffeine, hallucinogens, nicotine, volatile solvents and phencyclidine are also classified as psychoactive substances. There is no doubt that humans use drug to improve their general well-being. Fareo [6] notes that since the early times, herbs, leaves and plants have been use to heal and control diseases. The use of drugs in itself does not constitute any danger,

when correctly administered. However, drug obsession and addiction among youths has become one of the nauseating problems confronting the Nigerian society as this poses significant social, economic, and psychological problems in the country. Majority of the Nigerian youths ignorantly depend on one form of drug or the other for their various daily activities, and are increasingly abusing and experimenting with hard drugs like heroin and cocaine. Others substances like Indian hemp, which is frequently produced in Nigeria as well as Methamphetamine and tablet with codeine capable of intoxicating are mostly found in schools. Apart from cannabis, there is a growing abuse of synthetic drugs, that were once strange to the Nigerian environment which include but not limited to amphetamine, cocaine, heroin, glue, methamphetamine, paint thinner, cement, animal excreta, spirit, cough syrup made with codeine and so on. Studies conducted by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) revealed that adolescents and youths of both sex and between the ages of 13-35 years constitute the high risk group for drug abuse. Also the Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug problem in Nigeria conducted by NDLEA in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) revealed that the vulnerable groups for drug abuse include students, the unemployed, artisans (craftsman), commercial sex workers, long distance drivers, and street children. Lately, there are reports of obtaining feelings of euphoria in Nigeria through unusual means such as fumes from burning tyres, dry papaya leaves, burnt bitumen, and mixing methylated spirit with coca-cola soft drinks [9]. Over the years, a number of therapeutic approaches for drug and alcohol addiction have been utilized. However, relapse - the resumption of drug taking following a period of drug abstinence - is considered the main hurdle in treating drug addiction. Unfortunately, pharmacological treatment of drug and alcohol dependency has largely been disappointing and new therapeutic targets

and hypotheses are needed. For many years, it was assumed that all drugs of abuse release dopamine in the brain's reward system to produce pleasure and euphoria, and consequently, leading to addiction in vulnerable individuals. But, many agents, such as inhalants, barbiturates and benzodiazepines, do not activate midbrain dopamine-mediated transmission consistently, despite the fact that these drugs have rewarding properties and are heavily abused. Therefore, dopamine is not a simple marker of reward or hedonia and might no longer be tenable to suggest that drugs of abuse are simply activating the brain's 'natural reward system.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted the Social Learning Theory propounded by a psychologist, Albert Bandura in 1960s. In 1986, it was improved upon and renamed social cognitive theory. The theory believes that behaviour is learned by observation, identification and imitation, sometimes assisted by re-enforcement (not necessarily direct re-enforcement). This theory is in line with the indirect influence of the social media platforms or websites which are used by celebrities and personalities to advertise and lure young people into substances that could be injurious to their health and the society.

#### **Empirical Review**

Nearly all the geo political zones of Nigeria contribute to this menace one way or the other [10]. For instance, 20% of the school population in Edo state, Nigeria have taken a psychoactive drug once in their lives; substance abusers in the North west accounted for 37.47 percent of the nation's drug victims, south west, 17.32 percent; South East: 13.5 percent; North Central, 11.71 percent and North East, 8.54 percent [11]. Apart from cannabis, there is a growing abuse of synthetic drugs, that were once strange to the Nigerian environment which include but not limited to amphetamine, cocaine, heroin, glue, methamphetamine, paint thinner, cement, animal excreta, spirit, cough syrup made with codeine and so on. Within the last decade, the

involvement of Nigerian youths in drug abuse has taken a wide and frightening dimension. Studies conducted by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) from inception till date revealed that adolescents and youths of both sex and between the ages of 13 - 35 years constitute the high-risk group for drug abuse in the society. Also the Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug problem in Nigeria conducted by NDLEA in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) revealed that the vulnerable groups for drug abuse include students, the unemployed, artisans (craftsman), commercial sex workers, long distance drivers, and street children.

#### **Social Media and Substance Use among Young People**

Studies have shown that there exists a relationship between social media use and substance abuse among young people. Costello, and Ramo, [12] reports that a 2011 study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University showed that teens who use social media were more likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana than teens who do not use social media, and risk was higher for those who had seen pictures of kids using or passed out from alcohol or drugs. Costello, and Ramo, [12] also report that related studies show that undergraduate students with disordered online social networking use were more likely to have problematic drinking, and difficulties with emotion regulation. The study by [13] for instance, takes this area of inquiry a step further by demonstrating a pathway from social media use to increased drinking. Their findings show that peer injunctive norms serve as a mediator between social media exposure and the initiation of drinking behaviours [12]. Crosier and Marsch [14] indicate that substance abuse "has become a major problem at different level: personal, national and indeed global levels and lack of research has set back progress in trying to address this public health concern. It is a major problem because the celebrities

and personalities who accept to be used for advertisements or promotions for industries may not understand the long term effect of substance abuse such as depression, queer behaviour, sexual and domestic violence. Meanwhile, Yang, McCarron, Keller and Luo (n.d) aver that substance use is rampant and often glorified by celebrities on social media. There have been reports of social media being used as a strategy for selling drugs, with hashtags facilitating the process of pairing buyers with sellers." Costello and Remo [12] upheld the above view that "social media is used as strategy to advance the sale of illicit drugs, with hashtags facilitating the process of bringing buyers and sellers together. Hillard [15] believes that because celebrities promote drugs and alcohol use on social media sites by making smoking and drinking seem like fun, young people who see such messages are often encouraged to experiment with the same products. This is further supported by Moreno cited in [16] that social media have become a source of exposure to two different sources of influence associated with youth alcohol use and peer alcohol behaviour and advertizing. According to him, some young people prefer to be drunk in order to be high, perform creditably on the stage or dare certain actions without fear or favour. Seaman and Ikegwonu [4] concur with this proposition that drinking to achieve drunkenness was seen as a 'default" choice for peer socialisation. This is to say that consumption of local substances could have relationships with social media platforms which engage the youths in such behaviours through advertising and marketing. According to [17], and [3], global studies have shown that the major alcohol brands operate social media accounts of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in the United Kingdom and the United States of America where they exhibit and market their products.

The excessive drinking of alcohol leads to increase in heart-beating, weakening of the nervous system, causing indigestion and can interfere with a person's sense of

judgement. Hornby [18] defines alcohol as drinks such as beer, wine, etc, that can make people drunk. Martin, *et al* [5] states that alcohol is any of the class of organic compounds formed when a hydroxyl group (-OH) is substituted for a hydrogen atom in a hydrocarbon. This means that all alcoholic drinks -spirits, gin, hot drinks, beer, local palm wine and gin contain both carbon and hydrogen compounds which intoxicate after drinking some quantity of any of them. In addition to alcohol, young people also abuse drugs. Martin, [5] explain drugs as any substance that affects the structure or functioning of a living organism. Drugs are expected to be taken as a curative measure or diagnosing any type of illness or disease in the hospitals, clinical, medical laboratories and pharmacy shops, but in the contrary, many young people use them as stimulants. Kazeem [19] explains that the highest levels of drug use are recorded among people aged 25-39 years, with cannabis being the most widely used drug. The side effects of substance abuse had been so bad that Seyyedi and Abbasi cited [20] from his UNESCO report which showed that the behaviour caused by abusing drugs and alcohol are the causes of suicide and depression among youngsters across the world. Hillard [21] adds that for others, it can depress them to the point that they turn to drugs or alcohol for solace.

#### **Government Efforts on Drug Abuse Reduction and Eradication**

Going by the prevalence of substance abuse in the country, one is tempted to ask if the Nigerian government is bothered at all about the menace. Interestingly, tremendous increase in drug trafficking, substance abuse and obsession made the Federal government of Nigeria to establish the NDLEA (through the enactment of Decree 48 of 1989) and other organization-based interventions. Several attempts have been made to reduce and/or stop altogether, the circulation and consumption of illicit drugs by abusers including the young and productive Nigerians. Further step was taken to also establish within the NDLEA, a unit known as

Drug Demand Reduction .Drug Demand Reduction is a major statutory responsibility of the NDLEA saddled with the responsibility of helping those abusing drugs to overcome their dependency and reduce the risk they pose to themselves and others, with the ultimate aim of achieving a drug free and acceptable way of life; sensitizing the public on the dangers inherent in drug abuse by visiting schools, market women, road transport workers, artisans and the likes. To achieve the broad goals of drug demand reduction, already, there is a synergy between the NDLEA drug reduction programme unit and about 21 Non-Governmental Organizations who assists NDLEA in some form of preventive drug use, counselling and rehabilitative measures.

#### **Implications for Youth Education**

Young people who persistently abuse drugs often experience an array of problems, including academic difficulties health-related problems, (including mental health) poor peer relationships, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Additionally,

#### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION**

Drug abuse among young people has become a public health issue in Nigeria. Hence, it calls for ensuring a more responsible social media use among young people, which demands collective efforts from parents, schools, and the government. Also, policymakers such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the World Health

there are consequences for family members, the community and the entire society. Declining grades, absenteeism from school and other activities, and increased potential for dropping out of school are problems associated with adolescents' substance abuse. Also, a low level of commitment to education and a higher truancy rate appears to be related to substance use among young persons. Cognitive and behavioural problems experienced by alcohol, in addition to drug-using youth may interfere with academic performances and also present obstacles to learning for their classmates. Observations have revealed that these students have varying development needs and problems to contend with prominent among these problems are academic, vocational, personal-social and psychological. Indeed students' academic problems include poor learning methods, having unrealistic ideas of the amount of study necessary to pass examinations, teachers' inability to understand students' differences while teaching, and many others.

Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Children Organisation (UNESCO) can do more in the crusade to discourage glamorous online portrayal of substances among celebrities, especially by advertisers. Lastly, parents and guardians should monitor their children's online activities.

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