

## **Exposure to Sexual Contents on Internet and its Influence on the Sexual Behaviour of Teenagers in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State**

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### **Abstract**

The researcher examined the influence of internet exposure on the sexual behaviour of teenagers in Etsako West. Survey methodology was adopted while questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The simple percentage method was used for the presentation and analysis of data. The findings showed that Etsako West teenagers have accessed to the internet and Youtube was found to be the most preferred social media platform through which they are exposed to sexual content. The researcher, therefore, concluded that Etsako West teenagers are exposed to internet and they access sexual contents through Youtube. These contents have influence on them as they translate what they see on the internet into practical experience. This probably is why sexual immorality is predominantly high among the youth. On this ground, it was recommended that online and offline sexual orientation should be organised for youth.

**Keywords:** Sexuality, Sexual Behaviour, Internet, Teenagers

### **Introduction**

The use of the mass media to disseminate useful health information to the public, increases awareness of specific aspects of individual and collective health, as well as, importance of health in development, cannot be over-emphasised (Asemah, 2012). The media are frequently cited as one of the top sources of sexual education by young people who actively consume internet contents. It has also been proven that a lot of kids say their parents do not provide them enough information about sex while they are young (Brown, 2015). It is true that the internet and the tools that accompany it give young people access to a world that is distinct from their own. This implies that kids are exposed to a greater range of perspectives and information than they would otherwise obtain through their family, close friends, peers and teachers (Santrock, 2001). Due to societal changes, many identified figures from their families or figures whose attitudes regarding topics like sexuality may have once been more homogenous due to a common culture may no longer be the case. Media portrayals of sex as glamorous, thrilling and risk-free may be linked to the beginning and growth of sexually permissive views (Brown, Childers & Waszak, 2012).

Teenagers develop attitudes toward sex that are idealistic, ignore harmful effects, are stereotyped and sometimes unhealthy (Ward & Fredman, 2006). It has been noted that it is critical to understand how attitudes are formed and what influences them due to this influence and the media's dissemination of unrealistic pictures and ideas.

Many facets of social behaviour, including aggression, social stereotyping, pro-social behaviour and social views, have been found to be impacted by the media. Nowadays, the majority of social scientists concur that being exposed to violent contents online has a direct correlation with aggressive behaviour (Huston, 2013). However, studies show that there are solid theoretical grounds for thinking that the internet may play a significant role in the socialisation of sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. Despite this, the effects of sexual content and advertisements on the internet and new media have received relatively little attention from social researchers. This study looked at how exposure to the internet affects teens' sexual behaviour on this basis.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The potential impact of the internet on young people's sexual conduct has been a source of increased concern. Youth have access to the internet from very young ages and research has demonstrated that kids are exposed to sexual content online, especially on Instagram and Youtube (Kunkel, 2013). Previous research has not conclusively proven the impact of this exposure. According to Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfus (1993), exposure to sexual content can alter one's attitude about sex. In addition, Ward (2002) pointed out that acceptance of gender stereotypes was likely to encourage sexual initiation, unhappiness with virginity, and other conceptions of typical sexual conduct. Although, it is claimed that the internet has no discernible effects on children, parents and educators have expressed concern about these effects. In light of this, Maduewusi (2005) urged extreme prudence in internet exposure, particularly sex related content. Both positive and bad impacts could result from accessing the internet. As a result, it is sad that a lot of the internet contents that young people watch is sexual in nature.

Although, studies indicate that there are compelling theoretical arguments to think that the internet may play a significant role in the socialisation of sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, the effects of sexual content and advertisements on the internet and new media have received relatively little attention from social researchers. This study looked at how exposure to the internet affects young people's sexual behaviour on this basis.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the extent of exposure Estako West LGA teenagers to internet.
2. Ascertain the internet technology through which the teenagers get exposed to sexual contents.
3. Determine the influence of the exposure on their sexual behaviour.

### **Literature Review**

Many parents view the adolescent years as a challenging time because of all the experimentation and teenage role modeling. Early adulthood and adolescence can be seen as a period of adjustment. At this point, people also start to think about what kinds of sexual practices are pleasurable and moral (Fay & Yanoff, 2000). During this time, many teenagers begin to engage in sexual activity and in America and other developed

nations across the world, 46% or so of high school students have engaged in sexual activity (LeVay & Valente, 2003).

Each generation deals with the developmental milestone of sexuality for young people. Behavioural aspects of sexuality are included and the limits of sexual activity are becoming more relaxed. The only thing that seems to have changed over time are the circumstances, not perceptions (Jones & Boonstra, 2005). A society's emphasis on individual freedom and a right-driven culture, according to Szabo (2006), may contribute to this perceived permissiveness. In recent years, the media, particularly the internet, has played and continues to play a significant role in influencing adolescents' sexuality and sexual behaviours. Other factors that contribute to this include urbanisation, electronic communication (GSM), peer pressure and the breakdown of traditional parental and community structures (Hall & Sherry, 2004; Szabo, 2006). Every age group is susceptible to the sexual stuff on the internet. Adolescents may be more at risk because they are still going through impressionable developmental stages and trying to forge their own identities (Ward, 2003). Due to their developmental phases and inability to distinguish between good and bad media programming, adolescents may be exposed to sexual content in the media.

The world's social and economic conditions have been dramatically altered by the digital age. The ICT has greatly benefited Sub-Saharan African nations since access to mobile network coverage has increased dramatically. Between the 1990s and 2000s, mobile network coverage in Africa increased from a pitiful 16% to an astounding 90% (Guerriero, 2015).

About 700 million people still do not have access to mobile internet services in SSA (Adepetu, 2017) suggesting that access to the internet in this part of the world is still very poor. Research has found that adolescents are the most users of the Internet. Teenagers are the most regular Internet users, and SSA is no different. This is due to the fact that they are more intelligent, imaginative and adaptable when it comes to digitalisation (Consalvo & Ess, 2011). Adolescents make up the majority of SSA's 420 million internet users, while older generations are still lagging behind the rising trends in mobile and Internet usage. It should be noted, though, that not all teenagers have equal access to cell phones and the Internet. Whereas the majority of the older generations are still struggling to catch up with the growing trends in mobile and Internet usage in SSA. However, it must be emphasised that not all adolescents in SSA have equal access to mobile phones and the internet.

Most mobile phone and internet users in SSA live in cities and come from middle- and upper-class families. For these young people, access to and distribution of sociopolitical knowledge crucial for individual and societal growth is made possible by new media in a limitless number of ways. The internet played a significant role in the 2012 protests against the increase in pump price in Nigeria. Facebook, Twitter and other applications provided the platforms for mass mobilisation. Apart from aiding quick access to and dissemination of information, the new media are means of communicating with friends and family (Ibrahim, 2013). The mass media generally have a crucial role to play in every society; they inform, entertain, educate and socialise members of the society (Asemah, 2015a). To be in good health, the people need adequate and accurate information and knowledge on health measures, health conditions and diseases and more so, government health care programmes such as

immunisation, coverage for new vaccines, measures against prevalence of risk factors for non-communicable, as well as, communicable diseases and effectiveness of interventions against these diseases (Asemah, 2015b). Researchers, parents and policy makers are becoming concerned that modern media may also promote antisocial behaviour. For instance, in the United States, before the age of 18, 93% of males and 62% of females are exposed to online pornographic materials (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). Out of 1,500 adolescents tested, more than 20% claimed exposure to SEM and over half of the respondents said they looked for pornography on phone sex lines, according to Ybarra and Mitchell's 2005 research. Teenagers' sexual conduct is impacted by their exposure to online porn. According to studies, teenagers who are exposed to uncensored pornographic content online are more likely to report having oral virginal intercourse and to report having permissive sexual views (such as accepting premarital or casual sex) (Brown & Engle, 2009).

Asemah (2013) investigated the influence of social media sexual contents on the sexual behaviour of the students of Kogi State University, Anyigba. The findings showed that Facebook and 2go were the most used new media by students of Kogi State University. The findings also showed that Kogi State University students exposed themselves to sexual contents in the new media. More so, findings show that exposure to sexual contents in the new media lead to promiscuity among youth. Asemah & Ashonibare (2017) note that governments and public institutions attempt to protect the population from the consequences of unhealthy behaviour by way of social marketing campaigns. The primary objective of any campaign is to positively affect the behaviour of the target audiences. Thus, Asemah & Ezeji (2020) note that the mass media can be used to induce positive attitudinal change.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Learning Theory**

The SLT is a significant social psychological theory. Albert Bandura developed the key ideas and fundamental presumptions of the theory approximately fifty years ago. Children and teenagers pick up new knowledge and habits by observing and imitating others, claims SLT. SLT is a theory of learning that claims that antecedents like observation and watching typically cause behaviours to be triggered. Reciprocal determinism, which claims that environmental factors both influence and shape an individual's behaviour, is one of the mechanisms that promote learning.

Charles Bandura and his colleagues' research in the 1960s and 1970s examined whether or not live models were a more effective method of transmitting learned violence than the media (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963). The researchers of the Social and Dynamic Learning Theory (SLT) argued that the media are an effective tool for teaching children how to behave in a variety of social situations. The assumptions of the SLT include that children imitate aggressive behaviours of a live model and are able to generalise such responses to novel settings. The followings are the core assumptions of the SLT:

- i. Observational learning is achieved when the modeled behaviour is structured and rehearsed symbolically and then overtly enacted; the retention of that

behaviour occurs when the modeled behaviour is coded into words, labels or images.

- ii. The adoption of the modeled behaviour is strengthened when the outcomes of the behaviour are valued, seen as important to the individual or lead to desirable outcome.
- iii. The modeled behaviour is more likely to be integrated by the observer when the model has characteristics similar to the observer. In other words, where there is a cognitive-behavioural connection with the model, the model is admired by the observer and the behaviour that is adopted has practical or functional value (Bandura, 1977).

This theory of how young people learn about sexuality from others portrayed in the media aids in the understanding of how internet content that portrays sexual norms, stereotypes, double standards and sexual roles may have a significant impact on teens' perceptions of sex, body image, and social norms. Understanding how youth in Nigeria utilise internet content and engage in sexual behaviour is also helpful (Yarosan & Asemah, 2008; Asemah, 2011; Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017).

### **Methodology**

The researcher utilised the survey research method. Survey, according to Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafu & Okpanachi (2017), is a form of research design that is aimed at collecting large and small samples from a population in order to examine the distribution, incidence, interaction of educational activities like sociological and psychological variables. Survey was mainly used because it was considered the most suitable method for data collection method in the behavioural sciences. The population of this study comprises all residents of Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. The projected population for Etsako West Local Government in 2018 according to the National Population Commission (NPC) is 260,700. From this population, the researcher used the Taro Yamani sample size to determine the sample size. The Taro Yamani sample size was used because it gives room to a fair sample size and it was deemed appropriate for this study. The sample size was derived using the Taro Yamani sample size as follow:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where

n = sample size

N = population

e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{260700}{1 + 260700(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{260700}{1 + 651.75}$$

$$n = \frac{260700}{652.75}$$

$$n = 400$$

Because of the complexity of Etsako West Local Government Area, the multi-stage probability sampling method was used in selecting the sample for this study. The fish bowl method was used to divide Etsako west into five Areas. At the second stage, the simple random sampling was used to select five clans (Auchi, Uzairue, South-Ibie, Anwain and Aviele). At the third stage, from each of these clans, two villages were selected each. At the fourth stage, from the two villages, ten streets were selected. And at the fifth stage, the convenient sampling method was adopted to administer 40 copies of the questionnaire to ten people in each of the ten streets. Which is  $40 \times 10 = 400$ . This sampling procedure was adopted in order to give representation to all the areas that comprise Etsako West. The instrument that was used as data collection was the questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using the simple percentage method.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

The sample size for quantitative data was 400 respondents. Those that filled and returned questionnaire were 251 respondents making a response rate of 62.8%. According to Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting; a rate of 60% is good and a response rate of 70% and over is excellent. This means that the response rate for this study was good and, therefore, enough for data analysis and interpretation.

**Table 1: Exposure of Respondents to the Internet**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	251	100%
No	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data showed that the respondents are exposed to the internet. This is because 100% of the respondents are exposed to the internet.

**Table 2: Frequency of Access to the Internet**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Weekly	60	23.9%
Fortnightly	20	8%
Daily	151	60.2%
Monthly	20	8%
Other s	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 shows the frequency of access to the internet. Data showed that the respondents have access to the internet on daily basis. This is because 60% of the respondents have access to the internet on daily basis.

**Table 3: Respondents’ access to Sexual Content on the Internet**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly agree	151	60.2%
Agree	60	23.9%
Undecided	20	8%
Disagree	20	8%
Strongly disagree	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data in the table show that respondents access sexual contents on the internet. This is because 84% answered in that direction.

**Table 4: Internet Platform through which the Respondents access Sexual Contents**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Facebook	60	23.9%
Twitter	20	8%
Youtube	151	60.2%
Instagram	20	8%
Other s	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data show that sexual contents are mainly accessed by respondents on Youtube. This is because 60% of the respondents said they use Youtube to access sexual contents.

**Table 5: Responses on whether internet Content has influence on them**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	151	60.2%
Agree	60	23.9%
Undecided	20	8%
Disagree	20	8%
Strongly disagree	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table five showed whether respondents are influenced by the contents they are exposed to on the internet. The data showed that 84% of the respondents are influenced by the contents they are exposed to on internet.

**Table 6: Responses acting on the on Contents**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly agree	151	60.2%
Agree	60	23.9%
Undecided	20	8%
Disagree	20	8%
Strongly disagree	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data showed that 84% of the respondents said they act the contents they are exposed to on internet. This implies that the exposure has influence on them.

**Table 7: Influence of the Sexual Contents on the Sexual Behaviour of the Teenagers**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Positive	80	<b>31.9%</b>
Negative	151	<b>60.2%</b>
Can't Tell	20	<b>8%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

Going by the data in the above table, the sexual content on the internet has negative influence on the teenagers.

**Table 8: Extent of Practice of Sexual Content seen on the Internet**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very high	60	23.9%
High	151	60.2%
Can't tell	20	8%
Low	10	4%
Very low	10	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data showed that the respondents practise the sexual contents they are exposed to on the internet to a very great extent

### **Discussion of Findings**

The researcher examined the influence of internet exposure on the sexual behaviour of teenagers in Etsako West. The findings showed that showed that Etsako West teenagers are exposed to sexual contents on social media. Findings also showed that they are not only exposed to sexual contents on social media, but they are frequently exposed to sexual contents on social media. The above is in line with the findings of Boies (2002); Brym & Lenton (2001) who noted that the sampled members of the first generation to grow up with the internet commonly used the medium on a regular basis to meet new people and to date.

The findings further showed that the teenagers mainly success sexual contents on the internet through Youtube. Youtube is the proffered medium of accessing sexual content probably because it is mainly a video sharing site. This attests to the power of audio-visual media. Information from research has clearly shown that the youth have access to internet from very tender ages and that they are exposed to sexual content on the internet, particularly Youtube and instagram (Kunkel, 2013). More so, the findings revealed that the teenagers' exposure to sexual content influenced them to start acting or practising what they see on the internet. This is in line with the study of Braun-Courviloe & Pogas (2009) which found that exposure to internet pornography is related to multiple sex partners. Lo &Wei (2005) also found that Taiwanese adolescents with increased exposure to internet pornography reported increased sexual permissive attitudes and sexually permissive behaviour. Also, the volume of intentional exposure

to internet pornography has a relationship with sexual preoccupation, defined as a strong cognitive engagement in sexual issue, including thinking frequently about sex. The findings of this study uphold the postulation of the theoretical foundation of this study which is the social learning theory. The study has established that continuous exposure to sexual content on the internet will help teenagers learn about sexual activities which in the long run will lead to them practicing what they have learnt on the internet.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it is hereby concluded that Etsako West teenagers are exposed to internet and they access sexual contents through Youtube. These contents have influence on them as they translate what they see on the internet into practical experience. This probably is why sexual immorality is predominantly high among the youth. Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are hereby given:

1. Government and other critical stakeholders should carry out strict regulation on internet sites to ensure that contents that are not teenage friendly are not posted.
2. Since it is established that teenagers are highly influenced by their exposure to sexual contents on the internet, there is the need to carry out constant online and offline sexual education among the youth.

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