

Social Media Exposure and Perceived Peer Influence on Substance Use Attitudes among Youth

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived influence of social media on substance usage among youths in Ilorin Emirate, Nigeria. Employing a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 400 respondents across five local government areas using stratified random sampling. The findings revealed that social media platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram significantly influence youths' attitudes and behaviours toward substance use. A large proportion of respondents reported frequent exposure to content that glorifies or normalizes substance use, while influencers and online groups further reinforced these portrayals. Descriptive and inferential analyses indicated that peer influence mediated through social media remains a powerful driver of substance experimentation and consumption. The study concludes that while social media serves as a tool for connection and engagement, it also contributes to shaping harmful behavioural patterns among youths. It recommends strategic interventions including policy regulation, digital literacy programs, and health communication campaigns that leverage social media platforms to counteract pro-substance content and promote healthier lifestyles.

Keywords: Social media, Youth, Substance use, Influence, Ilorin Emirate.

1. Introduction

Social media has transformed communication dynamics globally, and Nigeria is no exception. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have reshaped interpersonal relationships, political discourse, activism, and even health communication (Ogunyemi, 2022; Ibrahim, 2023). With over 140 million active users in Nigeria (Statista, 2023), social media has become deeply embedded in the everyday lives of young people, influencing their behaviours, aspirations, and lifestyles. This penetration has not only created opportunities for dialogue, self-expression, and activism, evident in movements such as #EndSARS, but has

also amplified challenges such as misinformation, peer pressure, and risky behaviours (Adebayo, 2023; Oloruntoba & Adeola, 2023).

One growing concern in this digital era is the relationship between social media and substance use among Nigerian youth. Research shows that youth are particularly susceptible to peer influence and online social comparison, where exposure to glamorised portrayals of drug and alcohol use by peers, celebrities, and influencers can normalise risky behaviours (Okafor, 2023; Adebayo, 2023). For instance, the visual and interactive nature of platforms like Instagram and TikTok enables the curation of celebratory lifestyles that often showcase alcohol or drug use as socially desirable (Ibrahim, 2023). This trend

contributes to experimentation and increased substance use among youth, raising serious public health and societal concerns.

At the same time, social media provides opportunities for harm reduction and awareness campaigns, such as the #SayNoToDrugs initiative, which leverages online platforms to sensitise young people about the dangers of substance abuse (Nwosu, 2023). This dual role of social media, as both a promoter of risky behaviours and a platform for education, creates a paradox that requires careful scholarly investigation. Moreover, the anonymity afforded by online platforms fosters discussions about substance use that may otherwise be stigmatised offline. While such interactions can encourage help-seeking behaviours, they can equally contribute to the further normalisation of substance use (Adeyemi, 2023).

Despite the significance of this issue, there remains a paucity of empirical research examining the perceived influence of social media on substance use specifically within Nigerian contexts. While global studies highlight the risks of digital exposure, few have explored how local cultural norms, youth aspirations, and socio-economic conditions intersect with social media content to shape substance use behaviours in Nigeria. Existing Nigerian studies (e.g., Ogunyemi, 2022; Adebayo, 2023) tend to focus on misinformation and activism, with less emphasis on the behavioural health dimensions of digital media use. This gap underscores the need for research that not only documents youth social media engagement patterns but also interrogates their implications for substance use in culturally diverse contexts like Ilorin Emirate.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to determine the perceived influence of social media on substance use among

youth in Ilorin Emirate, Nigeria. Specifically, it aims to: (i) examine the extent of social media usage among youth; (ii) identify the platforms most associated with substance use influence; (iii) assess the contribution of social media content to youth substance use behaviours; and (iv) evaluate variations in perceptions of influence across the youth population. By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on media effects and health behaviours, while offering insights for policymakers, educators, and public health practitioners working to curb substance abuse among young Nigerians.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Social Media Usage by Nigerian Youth

Social media has been widely defined and conceptualized in communication scholarship. Mangold and Faulds (2009) describe it as a broad range of online word-of-mouth forums, including blogs, chatrooms, discussion boards, consumer review sites, and microblogs. Similarly, Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, and Howes (2009) define social media as online practices that enable individuals to share opinions, experiences, insights, and digital content. While social media shares similarities with earlier communication platforms, it possesses unique features such as interactivity, immediacy, and participatory culture (Kleinberg, 2008). Among Nigerian youth, social media has become a central aspect of daily life, shaping social interactions, learning experiences, cultural expression, and even economic activities. With over 60% of Nigeria's population under the age of 25, a substantial proportion of young people are active on social media platforms, primarily for communication, entertainment, and access to information (Statista, 2023). Platforms such as

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp dominate usage, each serving distinct purposes—Facebook for networking, Instagram for visual storytelling, Twitter for real-time discourse, TikTok for short-form entertainment, and WhatsApp for instant communication (Ogunyemi, 2023).

Social media fosters connections that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, facilitating friendships, collaborations, and exposure to diverse perspectives. However, this transformation raises concerns about the depth and authenticity of relationships. Studies suggest that reliance on online communication may reduce face-to-face interactions, which are vital for building interpersonal and social skills (Adeleke, 2023).

The mental health implications of social media use among Nigerian youth are increasingly documented. Excessive use has been linked to anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem, particularly when young people compare themselves with idealized portrayals online. Cyberbullying, harassment, and negative digital interactions further exacerbate these challenges, highlighting the double-edged nature of social media engagement (Ogunyemi, 2023).

In the sphere of education, social media serves as a tool for collaboration, information sharing, and access to academic resources. Yet, distractions and overuse often undermine productivity, making balance a persistent challenge for students (Adeleke, 2023). Social media also functions as a cultural space where Nigerian youth negotiate identity, participate in conversations on ethnicity, religion, and social justice, and engage with global and local cultural narratives. While these platforms empower voices for advocacy and change, the influence of global trends sometimes overshadows indigenous cultural practices.

Economically, social media has opened new avenues for youth entrepreneurship and employment. Many young Nigerians leverage these platforms for marketing, branding, and influencer activities, demonstrating the economic empowerment potential of digital networks (Adeleke, 2023).

Despite these opportunities, challenges such as misinformation, privacy risks, and addiction remain pressing. Young people are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation due to limited awareness of online safety practices. The rapid spread of false information in Nigeria's politically sensitive environment further underscores the risks of unregulated social media use (Ogunyemi, 2023).

In summary, social media use among Nigerian youth presents a complex landscape of benefits and risks. While it supports communication, cultural expression, education, and economic empowerment, it also threatens mental well-being, personal safety, and cultural identity. Addressing these dynamics requires deliberate efforts from parents, educators, policymakers, and youth themselves to promote safe, balanced, and constructive social media practices.

Social Media and Substance Use

Researchers widely acknowledge the ease with which connections are fostered within the media environment, yet this interactivity presents notable risks. Njoroge (2011) observes that while new media enhances communication, it also expands opportunities for the marketing and transmission of harmful goods and behaviors. Social media, in particular, exposes young people to deviant role models and risky content, thereby influencing their attitudes and behaviors. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that adolescents and young adults are especially vulnerable due to their early adoption of digital platforms, near-

constant usage, and susceptibility to peer influence.

Alcohol use among adolescents and young adults remains a serious concern, as it contributes to both unintentional harms—such as motor vehicle accidents and violence—and intentional harms, including self-inflicted injury. Studies of platforms such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter have shown that alcohol-related content is both widespread and impactful. Displays of drinking behavior online often reflect personal substance use and reinforce peer norms, shaping perceptions of acceptability among viewers (Flory, Lynam, Milich, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2004; Moreno et al., 2010).

Beyond individual expression, alcohol companies themselves exploit social media to reach younger audiences. Many brands maintain active online presences, fostering engagement and building loyalty among youth. Although age-verification systems exist, they are easily bypassed, leaving adolescents vulnerable to targeted advertising (Jernigan & Rushman, 2014; Litt & Stock, 2011).

While less research has explored the promotion of illicit substances online, emerging evidence highlights the growing visibility of marijuana-related content. Azofeifa et al. (2016) note that legalization trends in the United States have amplified marijuana's online presence. Despite prohibitions on direct advertising, businesses circumvent restrictions through social media “business pages,” which remain accessible to users of all ages. Global studies of Twitter further underscore this trend: Lenhart (2015) found that the majority of marijuana-related messages were positive, with nearly 60% generated by youth under the age of twenty. These messages often originate from users with substantial followings, suggesting the potential for widespread normalization of drug use.

Taken together, these findings illustrate the dual role of social media as both a peer-influence mechanism and a marketing tool for substances, creating an environment where risky behaviors can be easily promoted, shared, and normalized among youth.

The Prevalence of Drug Usage in Nigeria

Drug usage has become a significant social and public health concern in Nigeria, with far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and communities (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021). The problem of drug abuse in Nigeria is multifaceted, cutting across various demographic groups and geographical regions within the country.

One of the primary drivers of drug usage in Nigeria is the ease of access and availability of illicit substances. Nigeria's porous borders and the presence of drug trafficking networks have enabled the influx of a wide range of drugs, including cannabis, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine (Olatunde & Onyeizugbe, 2018). The proliferation of these substances has led to an increase in their consumption, particularly amidst the youth population.

The use of drugs in Nigeria is not limited to illicit substances; the misuse of prescription and over-the-counter medications has also become a growing problem. Easy access to these medications, together with a dearth of regulatory oversight and public awareness, has contributed to the rise of prescription drug abuse (Odejide, 2016). This trend is particularly concerning, as the misuse of these drugs can lead to severe health consequences and addiction. The social and economic factors that contribute to drug usage in Nigeria are complex and multifaceted. Poverty, unemployment, lack of educational and recreational opportunities, and the influence of peer groups have all been

identified as significant risk factors (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021). These circumstances can drive individuals, especially the youth, to turn to drugs as a means of coping with their challenges or as a way to seek social belonging and acceptance.

The impact of drug usage on Nigerian society is profound. The health consequences of drug abuse, such as the increased risk of physical and mental health problems, have placed a significant burden on the healthcare system (Odejide, 2016). Additionally, drug-related crimes, including violence, theft, and the disruption of social order, have become increasingly prevalent, undermining the overall well-being and development of communities (Olatunde & Onyeizugbe, 2018).

The Nigerian government has recognized the severity of the drug abuse problem and has taken various measures to address it. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has been tasked with the responsibility of curbing the production, trafficking, and consumption of illicit drugs (NDLEA, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these efforts has been hampered by a lack of resources, inadequate coordination among relevant agencies, and the persistence of underlying socioeconomic issues that contribute to drug usage.

In recent years, there have been growing efforts to strengthen the legal and policy frameworks surrounding drug control in Nigeria. The country has enacted laws to criminalize the possession, sale, and distribution of illicit substances, and has introduced rehabilitation and treatment programs for individuals struggling with addiction (Olatunde & Onyeizugbe, 2018). However, the implementation and enforcement of these measures have been uneven, and more comprehensive and coordinated approaches are needed to

tackle the complex challenge of drug abuse in Nigeria.

Addressing the problem of drug usage in Nigeria will require a multi-pronged approach that combines law enforcement, public health interventions, and social development initiatives. This includes enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to disrupt drug trafficking networks, improving access to addiction treatment and rehabilitation services, and investing in education, job creation, and community-based programs that address the underlying social and economic factors driving drug abuse (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021).

Importantly, the involvement and empowerment of local communities are crucial in the fight against drug usage. By fostering community-based initiatives, enhancing public awareness, and promoting alternative recreational and educational opportunities, Nigeria can work towards reducing the demand for drugs and creating more resilient communities (Odejide, 2016).

In conclusion, the issue of drug usage in Nigeria is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive and sustained effort from the government, civil society, and the public at large. Addressing the root causes, strengthening the legal and policy frameworks, and empowering communities, Nigeria can work towards reducing the prevalence of drug abuse and its detrimental impact on the country's social, economic, and public health landscape.

Social Media and Depiction of Psychoactive Substance

Social media and lifestyle decisions can frequently affect a person's risk of substance use, claim Davies, Elison, Ward, and Laudet (2015). Because social media is so widely used, it is necessary to comprehend how it affects users' substance use or abuse. Images on social media can clearly show substance use

(e.g., drinking, drunken behaviour), along with associated social (e.g., attending a party) and environmental elements (e.g., bottles, syringes, pills). According to Morgan, Snelson, and Elison-Bowers (2010), a third of young adults who use social media have shared content online that shows substance use.

Thus, social media posts can serve as potential examples of social and environmental factors as well as risk factors for substance use. For example, Instagram is reportedly to have 800 million monthly active users as of September 2017; the majority of these users are teenagers (Etherington, 2017). According to Verto Analytics (2018), Instagram is currently the second most popular social networking app in the US. It was an obvious choice for this study due to its enormous user base as of right now, its quick growth rates, its appeal to younger users, and its extremely accessible application programme interface (API). Users of social media post text and image content about themselves, sharing personal information that is used to generate data for risk assessments of substance use. Because of social desirability and self-promotion, social media profiles may present sanitised versions of users (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007).

Using social media platforms opens up new avenues for exposure to harmful substances because of the increased advertising of these substances on these platforms (Montgomery & Chester, 2009). The Policy Statement fraught by the Council on Communications and Media (2010) states that teens are even more likely to encounter this. Studies show that between 25 and 37 percent of older young adults share information about their alcohol use. Teenagers report that their friends' photos and comments make up the majority of the content they see on social

media (Moreno, Parks, Zimmerman Brito, & Christakis, 2009).

Teenagers may believe from the content of these posts that using drugs is common among peers their own age or older. Teenagers who see positive portrayals of alcohol use on Facebook from their older peers are more likely to adopt an attitude towards alcohol use than those who are not as exposed to such portrayals (Litt and Stock, 2011).

The application of social media has amplified in popularity and prevalence to the point where it is now linked to a clinical disorder with symptoms resembling abuse, like obsessive, compulsive online social networking. Recently, a number of writers have asserted that this develops into a form of behavioural addiction Andreassen (2015), and some contend that social media addiction has increased since the introduction of new technologies (tablets, smartphones). There is a very good chance that information in social media posts that suggests risk could lead to substance abuse or use. Nevertheless, the platform may also function as an outreach location where future therapeutic services could connect with people who might find use for them.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between social media use and youth substance abuse, highlighting both risks and opportunities in this dynamic.

Olayemi (2022) investigated the perceived influence of social media usage among youth in Lagos State through a survey of 200 participants. The study revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most commonly used platforms, and the majority of respondents agreed that social media had a negative impact on their behaviour and lifestyle. Similarly, Eze (2023) established a strong link between celebrity endorsements on social media

and the promotion of substance use among youth, noting that advertisements often glamorised smoking and drinking, thereby normalising such behaviours.

International research has provided further insights. Costello and Ramo (2017), for instance, found a positive correlation between adolescents' use of social media and substance abuse. Their quantitative survey demonstrated that teenagers exposed to images of alcohol and drug use online were significantly more likely to engage in such behaviours compared to their peers. Hillard (2019) corroborated these findings, reporting that celebrity promotions on social media made drug and alcohol use appear enjoyable, reinforcing peer pressure and advertising as dual sources of influence.

Closer to the Nigerian context, Abdulhameed et al. (2022) studied drug abuse among youth in Ilorin Emirate. Using purposive and snowball sampling, they discovered that alcohol, marijuana, tramadol, and tobacco were the most abused substances. Their findings highlighted how social factors and limited social welfare intervention exacerbated substance use. Complementing this, Ahmad et al. (2022) assessed the effectiveness of social media-based interventions in reducing drug abuse propensity. They found that youths exposed to targeted online campaigns showed a decline in substance use tendencies, with long-term interventions proving especially impactful.

Evidence from outside Africa also supports the association between social media and substance use. Buja et al. (2018) examined problematic social networking site use among 1,325 Italian adolescents and found that heavy users of social media were significantly more likely to consume alcohol and energy drinks. Likewise, Linda et al. (2021), using data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study, reported that

adolescents who increased their social media use over time were more likely to engage in frequent drinking and binge drinking.

Other regional studies have highlighted similar concerns. Patel et al. (2020) linked drug use among Kenyan secondary school students to peer pressure, weak school administration, and parental socioeconomic factors. Rizvi et al. (2019) in Pakistan and Ira et al. (2019) in Indonesia identified peer influence, fashion trends, and stakeholder support as critical variables in youth substance use and prevention. Most recently, Sulaiman et al. (2024) revealed that drug abuse among students in Kwara State, Nigeria, was driven by social environment, family dynamics, and peer pressure, with consequences such as memory loss and cognitive delays.

Taken together, these empirical studies underscore that social media is both a facilitator and a risk factor in youth substance use. While it amplifies peer and celebrity influence, contributing to risky behaviours, it also serves as a platform for preventive interventions. However, there is still a paucity of context-specific research in Nigeria, particularly in Ilorin Emirate, where social, cultural, and economic conditions may uniquely shape how social media influences substance use among youth. This gap reinforces the need for localised studies to inform targeted interventions.

Theoretical Review: Social Learning Theory

This study is anchored on theoretical perspectives of Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura. The Theory provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how social media shapes youth behaviour, particularly regarding substance use.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) explains behaviour acquisition through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. According to the theory,

individuals learn by watching others, particularly role models or peers, and reproducing the observed behaviours if they perceive them as rewarding. Reinforcement, either positive or negative, further determines whether the behaviour is sustained. Within the context of social media and substance use, this theory illustrates how youths may adopt drug-related behaviours by observing peers or influencers who glamorise such practices online.

Eze (2023) supports this position, noting that social media platforms often serve as indirect avenues through which celebrities and influencers promote harmful behaviours. When these behaviours are perceived as socially acceptable or desirable, young audiences are more likely to imitate them. Thus, Social Learning Theory provides a robust framework for explaining how social exposure to substance use content online can translate into real-life behavioural adoption.

The theory's strength lies in its ability to account for a wide range of human behaviours, including aggression, pro-social acts, and health-related practices (Bandura, 2006 as cited in Razieh, 2012). It also highlights the significance of modelling and observational learning as central processes in socialisation. However, critics argue that it places too much emphasis on environmental factors while underplaying internal variables such as motivation, cognition, and individual differences. Furthermore, its predictive power is limited, as it does not fully account for the complex interplay between cultural context, social norms, and personal agency.

The Theory provides a comprehensive lens for examining how social media contributes to substance use among youths in Nigeria through the mechanisms of behaviour acquisition.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a systematic methodology to investigate the perceived influence of social media on substance usage among youth in Ilorin Emirate. The methodology outlines the research design, population, sample size, sampling procedure, research instrument, validity and reliability tests, and methods of data analysis.

The study employed a quantitative approach using a survey design. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize, survey research enables structured data collection from a defined population, facilitating statistical analysis of attitudes and behaviours. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses from youths in Ilorin Emirate regarding their perceptions of the effect of social media on substance use.

The target population comprised youths within Ilorin Emirate, which includes Ilorin East, Ilorin West, Ilorin South, Asa, and Moro Local Government Areas. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), the youth population in this region was approximately 904,859. Using the Taro Yamane formula with a 5% margin of error, the study arrived at a sample size of 400 respondents.

A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure representativeness across age categories. The youth population was divided into five strata (15–20, 21–25, 26–30, 31–35, and 36–40 years), from which proportional samples were drawn. For instance, 170 respondents were selected from the 15–20 years category, while 110, 40, 40, and 40 were drawn from the other strata respectively. Within each stratum, simple random sampling ensured every youth had an equal chance of being selected. This approach enhanced inclusivity and reliability of findings by capturing diverse experiences across age groups.

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, organized into four sections. Section A collected demographic data, while Sections B, C, and D contained questions on social media use and its influence on substance use. A 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”) was used to measure respondents’ opinions. The questionnaire items were adapted from related studies and refined to suit the study’s objectives.

Content validity was established through expert review and alignment with existing literature. To test reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 40 youths outside the study area, and Cronbach’s Alpha was used to assess internal consistency. Results showed high reliability across constructs: extent of social media use (0.922), influential platforms (0.960), contribution of content to substance use (0.923), and differences in perceived influence (0.966). These values exceeded the 0.7 threshold, confirming strong internal consistency and dependability of the instrument.

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize youth perceptions of social media usage. Inferential statistics were employed to test relationships and differences among variables, thereby providing insights into the extent to which social media contributes to substance use. This approach ensured a comprehensive

analysis aligned with the research objectives.

Overall, this methodological framework provided a rigorous basis for generating valid, reliable, and generalizable findings on the perceived influence of social media on substance usage among youths in Ilorin Emirate.

4. Results and Discussions

This section presents the key findings from the study, focusing on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and their perceptions of the influence of social media on substance use. Data were analysed using SPSS, with results presented in tables and summarized narratively.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study sample consisted of 400 youths in Ilorin Emirate. As shown in Table 1, female respondents formed the majority (56%), while males constituted 44%. The age distribution indicates that most participants were between 15–30 years (83.1%), highlighting a youthful respondent base. In terms of education, the majority (75.3%) had post-secondary qualifications (ND/NCE, HND, B.Sc., or M.Sc.), reflecting a relatively educated population. Occupationally, 38.8% were farmers, 25.4% entrepreneurs, 19.5% civil servants, and 16.3% corporate officers, showing a strong representation of informal and agricultural employment.

Table 1

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Demographic	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	176	44.0
	Female	224	56.0
Age	15–20 years	111	27.8
	21–25 years	127	31.8
	26–30 years	94	23.5
	31+ years	68	17.0
Education	Primary	24	6.0
	O'Level	70	17.5
	ND/NCE	121	30.3
	HND/B.Sc./B.A	180	45.0
	M.Sc.	5	1.2
Occupation	Civil Servant	78	19.5
	Farmer	155	38.8
	Corporate Officer	65	16.3
	Entrepreneur	102	25.4

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Extent of Social Media Usage

The results (Table 2) reveal a high level of engagement with social media among youths. A majority (70.3%) reported daily use, while 50.3% spend more than two hours daily on social media. Additionally, 54.8% identified social media as their primary information source, and 70.5% used it to connect with family and friends. Content-sharing was also prevalent, with 72.6% actively sharing with peers. Following influencers was common (48.3%), showing the role of online personalities in shaping youth behaviours.

Mean scores above 4.0 across most items indicate high engagement. Daily use ($M = 4.71$) and connecting with family/friends ($M = 4.72$) were the strongest drivers. Content-sharing ($M = 4.66$) and influencer-following ($M = 4.34$) further highlight the centrality of social media in youths' routines. Overall, social media is not only a communication tool but also a primary information and identity-building platform. Generally, the data underscore the centrality of social media in the daily lives of youths in Ilorin Emirate.

Table 2

Extent of Social Media Use among Youths

Statement	Agree (%)	Strongly (%)	Agree	Mean
I use social media daily	36.5	33.8		4.71
I spend >2 hours daily	35.0	15.3		4.31
I use social media as primary information source	37.5	17.3		4.33
I connect with friends/family	23.5	47.0		4.72

Platforms Influencing Substance Usage

As presented in Table 3, TikTok (59.5%), YouTube (72.3%), and Snapchat (66.3%) were identified as the most influential

platforms in promoting substance use, largely due to their engaging video-driven content and influencer culture.

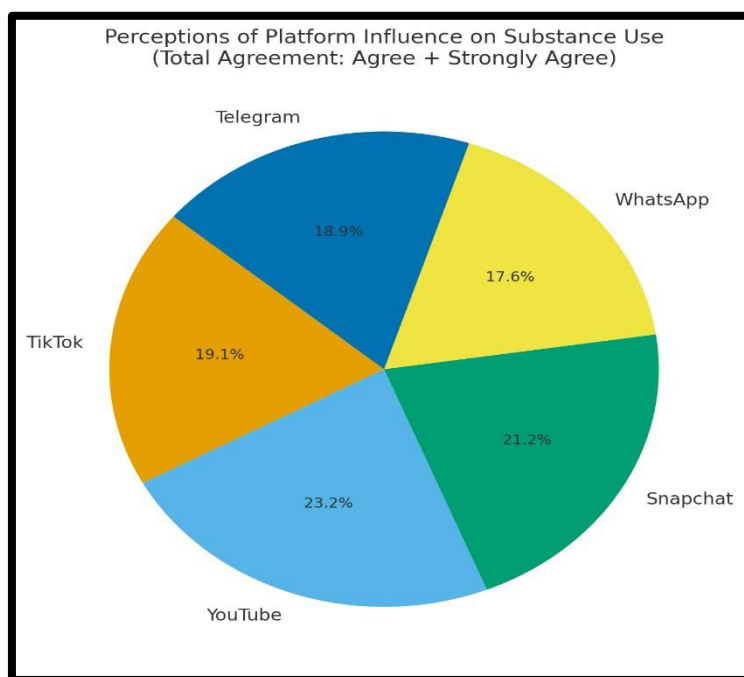


Figure 1. Platforms Influencing Substance Usage

WhatsApp (55.1%) and Telegram (59%) were moderately influential, mainly through private groups. Facebook and Twitter showed mixed perceptions, with divided opinions on their level of impact.

Table 3

Perceptions of Platform Influence on Substance Use

Platform	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean
TikTok	16.0	43.5	4.66
YouTube	55.8	16.5	4.66
Snapchat	38.3	28.0	4.71
WhatsApp	29.8	25.3	4.62
Telegram	39.0	20.0	4.45

Influence of Social Media Content

This finding highlights that 63% of youths reported frequent exposure to posts promoting substance use, while 60.1% acknowledged seeing content that glorifies substance use. Influencers were also noted, with 44.6% agreeing they promote substance use. Notably, 83.5%

TikTok (M = 4.66), YouTube (M = 4.66), and Snapchat (M = 4.71) were perceived as the most influential in shaping attitudes toward substance use. Platforms emphasizing short-form, trend-driven, and visually engaging content stood out compared to Facebook (M = 4.11) and Twitter (M = 4.57), which showed moderate influence.

had encountered groups where substance use was actively promoted, and 77.8% believed peer behaviours were influenced by such portrayals. These findings suggest that beyond casual exposure, social media content actively contributes to shaping substance-related perceptions and behaviours.

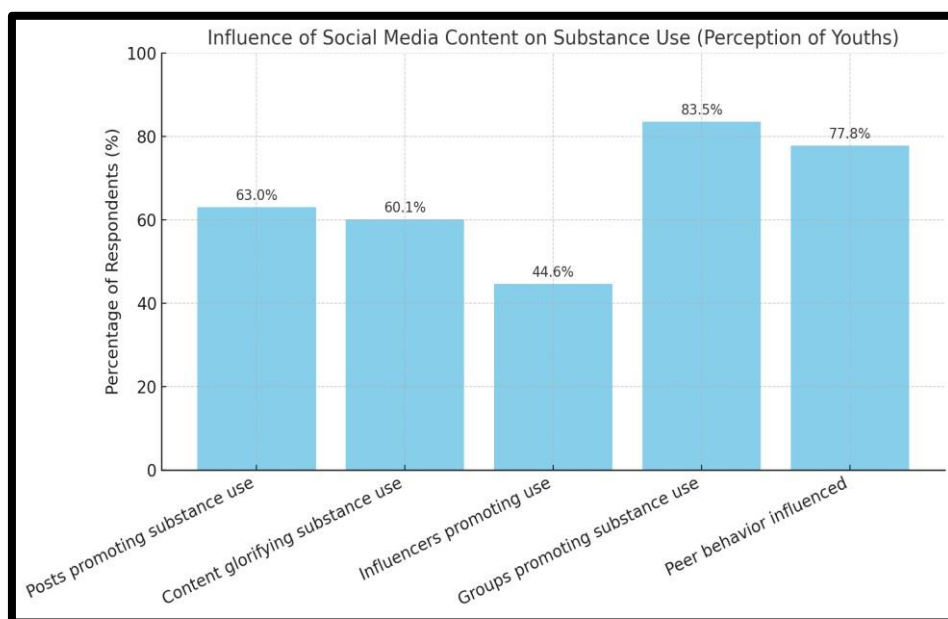


Figure 2. Influence of Social Media Content

Respondents reported high exposure to substance-related posts, with notable agreement that portrayals influence peers’ behaviours (M = 4.32) and that dedicated groups promote substance use (M = 4.41). While explicit advertising appeared less frequent (M = 3.80), user-generated and influencer content were seen as key channels of normalization.

Table 4

Differences in Perceived Platform Influence

Platform	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean
Instagram	62.3	11.0	4.71
Snapchat	15.0	72.8	4.15
TikTok	12.0	62.5	4.51
YouTube	15.3	65.0	4.51

Perceptions varied by platform. Snapchat (M = 4.15), Instagram (M = 4.71), and TikTok (M = 4.51) were considered more impactful due to short video trends, while YouTube (M = 4.51) exerted influence through longer narrative formats. Significant mean differences suggest that platform affordances, ephemeral content vs. long-form engagement, shape perceived influence.

Differences Across Platforms

Table 4 indicates that platforms differ in how they influence substance use. Instagram (73.3%), Snapchat (87.8%), and TikTok (74.5%) were viewed as more influential due to short, engaging videos and trend-based culture. YouTube (80.3%) was also prominent, especially through films and documentaries. Facebook and Twitter were perceived as moderately influential, largely through multimedia and graphics.

The analysis demonstrates that youths in Ilorin Emirate are heavy users of social media, primarily for social interaction and information access. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat are perceived as highly influential in promoting substance use, while influencers and peer-driven content amplify this influence. Overall, the findings underscore the pervasive role of social media in shaping youth attitudes toward substances, with significant

implications for public health, education, and policy interventions.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the role of social media in shaping youth behaviours in Ilorin Emirate, with specific emphasis on substance use.

Patterns of Social Media Engagement:

Findings reveal a high degree of social media penetration among respondents, with daily usage and prolonged engagement exceeding two hours for most participants. These results echo global studies indicating that youth are among the most active social media consumers (Pew Research Center, 2023). In particular, the use of social media as both a primary source of information and a platform for maintaining relationships highlights its dual function as an informational and socializing tool.

Platform-Specific Influence: The results show that TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat exert the strongest perceived influence on substance use among youths. These platforms are characterized by visually immersive, trend-driven, and influencer-led content, consistent with recent research suggesting that video-based platforms are more likely to shape identity and lifestyle choices among adolescents (Omar & Dequan, 2020). By contrast, Facebook and Twitter demonstrated a weaker perceived influence, possibly reflecting their broader demographic reach and less trend-centric affordances.

Content Contribution and Normalization: Respondents reported frequent exposure to posts and groups promoting or glorifying substance use, with peer behaviours seen as particularly influenced by such portrayals. This aligns with studies demonstrating that repeated exposure to substance-related imagery online fosters normalization and desensitization (Primack et al., 2017). Notably, direct advertisements were

perceived as less prevalent, suggesting that informal, user-generated content plays a more significant role in shaping attitudes than commercial campaigns.

Cross-Platform Differences: The study highlights meaningful differences in how platform affordances mediate influence. Short-form, ephemeral content (e.g., TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram) was seen as more impactful compared to long-form narratives (YouTube) or mixed-media platforms (Facebook, Twitter). These variations underscore the importance of considering platform-specific strategies in both media literacy interventions and public health campaigns.

Implications for Youth Culture and Policy: Overall, the findings suggest that social media is not merely a communication channel but a cultural space where norms around substance use are contested and reproduced. For policy and practice, interventions must target the specific logics of dominant platforms, emphasizing critical media literacy, peer-led counter-narratives, and collaborations with influencers who shape youth discourses.

5. conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

This study examined the perceived influence of social media on substance usage among youths in Ilorin Emirate. The findings revealed that social media platforms, particularly TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and YouTube, play a significant role in shaping youths' attitudes and behaviours toward substance use. A high proportion of respondents reported frequent exposure to content that glorifies or normalizes substance use, while many also acknowledged the role of influencers and online groups in reinforcing such behaviours. The results further demonstrated that peer influence, mediated through social media platforms,

remains a powerful driver of substance experimentation and consumption.

The study underscores the dual nature of social media: while it provides opportunities for information sharing and connection, it also poses risks by amplifying harmful behaviours. These findings highlight the urgent need for strategic interventions that leverage the same platforms to promote healthy lifestyles, discourage substance abuse, and encourage positive peer modeling.

Recommendations

1. **Policy and Regulation:** Government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should collaborate with social media companies to regulate and limit the spread of harmful content that glorifies substance use.
2. **Health Communication Campaigns:** Stakeholders in health communication and public health should design targeted social media campaigns that counteract pro-substance content with credible, engaging, and youth-centered messages promoting drug-free lifestyles.
3. **Digital Literacy and Education:** Schools and tertiary institutions within the Ilorin Emirate should integrate digital literacy programs into their curricula. Such programs should focus on critical consumption of online content, enabling students to discern harmful portrayals of substance use.
4. **Parental and Community Engagement:** Parents and community leaders should be sensitized on the growing influence of social media. By engaging youths in constructive discussions and providing guidance, they can mitigate the impact of harmful online content.
5. **Youth-Led Initiatives:** Encouraging peer-led interventions and online advocacy groups can amplify positive

role modeling. Youth influencers should be trained and supported to create content that discourages substance abuse while promoting healthy social behaviours.

6. **Further Research:** Future studies should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to capture not only perceptions but also the causal effects of prolonged exposure to substance-related content on social media.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, educators, and community leaders can harness the potential of social media as a tool for positive behavioural change while minimizing its negative impact on youth substance use.

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