SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON EMERGING ADULTS AND LATE TEENS IN ABEOKUTA , OGUN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates social media as a catalyst for relationships among emerging adults and late teens in Abeokuta North and South local governments of Ogun State, Nigeria. It examines how social media affects young people's interaction, decision-making and lifestyle choices. The study adopts a survey design with data collected from 268 students across four government secondary schools in the state. Descriptive statistics ware used to analysed the data. Findings reveals that emerging adults and late teens used social media primarily for social interactions, entertainments, self-expression relationship building, and keeping up with fashion trend, rather than for academic purposes. Social media also exposes them to diverse of network and social site that influences and challenge conventional norms of social behavior. The study conclude that while social media enhances connectivity and self-expression, it also shapes values and practices that may conflict with established societal expectations.

Keywords*: social media, emerging adult, teen, teenager, relationship.*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Social media has become a tool with which teenagers and adult alike use for engagement. It has become a place for making new friends, nurturing friendships and eventually facing the unexpected. Social media applications such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and a host of others are available on the Play Store for download. Teenagers around the world with access to the internet find it amusing and interesting to belong to the trendy fashion. Across the globe, individuals with access to the internet and an Android mobile phone often find themselves connected to at least one of the many social media platforms available. These platforms undeniably empower teenagers and emerging adults to connect with friends and like-minded individuals worldwide. The functionalities of these apps encompass sharing text, pictures, videos, and messages, making it simple to reach out and forge new friendships.

It is becoming increasingly concerning that teenagers and emerging adults, who should be honing their communication skills and understanding the dynamics of friendships, are engaging in virtual relationships. If not approached with caution, online relationships can be detrimental to their personal development. This digital environment is not conducive for young individuals who are still learning how to cultivate meaningful friendships. Online interactions often inhibit the essential face-to-face connections that facilitate genuine friendship development.

In the 21st century, digital communication has profoundly transformed the ways in which young people develop, maintain, and experience interpersonal relationships. One of the most impactful tools in this landscape is social media, which enables users to share content, connect with others, and form virtual communities. For emerging adults (typically defined as individuals aged 18–25) and late teenagers (approximately 16–19 years old), social media increasingly serves as a vital conduit for relationship formation and maintenance. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) function not only as communication tools but also as spaces for identity formation, social comparison, emotional expression, and the negotiation of intimacy (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Consequently, social media can be viewed as a catalyst that accelerates, enhances, or even complicates romantic, platonic, and familial relationships among young individuals during these critical developmental stages.

To understand the role of social media in relationships, it's important to consider a developmental context. According to Arnett (2000), the transition from adolescence to adulthood involves identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and experimentation in love and work. These traits align with the features of social media, where curated self-presentations on platforms like Instagram facilitate identity exploration. or

reflective TikTok posts. The fluidity of relationships and the constant connectivity made possible by social platforms reflect and reinforce the instability and self-focus of this life stage.

Social media has brought opportunities that were unavailable to earlier generations, drastically changing how relationships are started and grown. Instagram and Snapchat give young adults and late teens a "low-risk" way to connect with possible romantic or platonic partners. The asynchronous nature of many interactions on these platforms allows users to thoughtfully craft their messages and present themselves in appealing ways (Walther, 2007). Additionally, this form of computer-mediated communication can lower social barriers, making it especially beneficial for introverts or individuals dealing with social anxiety, thus broadening access to social interactions (Huang, 2010).
In romantic contexts, social media acts as both a meeting ground and a relationship management tool. Young people increasingly find partners through dating apps like Tinder and Bumble (Smith, 2016). Once relationships are established, these platforms facilitate public displays of affection, such as "relationship posts," which can boost satisfaction and commitment (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). However, they can also create strain through behaviors like "partner surveillance" and "sub tweeting" about conflicts (Fox & Warber, 2014). This dual role highlights social media's complex impact on modern relationships.

Past sentimental traps, social media is instrumental in maintaining fellowships and forming bunch personalities among late high schoolers and developing grown-ups. Gather chats, collaborative substance creation, and computerized labeling all offer assistance strengthen having a place and shared character (boyd, 2014). These highlights are particularly imperative as youthful individuals regularly move geologically moving for college, work, or travel and depend on computerized systems to keep up more seasoned companionships whereas shaping unused ones (Ellison, N.B., Heino, R.D., & Gibbs, J.I 2006).

Additionally, social media encourages what has been named "surrounding mindfulness" the low-level information approximately others picked up through reliable, inactive presentation to their online exercises (Thompson, 2008). This surrounding closeness can make a sense of closeness indeed in the nonattendance of visit coordinate communication, making a difference to maintain long-distance companionships and casual associations. In any case, it can moreover obscure the boundaries between open and private life, presenting modern challenges in overseeing interpersonal boundaries and enthusiastic well-being.

Whereas the potential for association and passionate bolster on social media is critical, it is not without dangers. Developing inquire about recommends that expanded social media utilize can be related with mental wellbeing issues such as uneasiness, sadness, and forlornness particularly when people lock in in upward social comparison or involvement cyberbullying (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). For late teenagers and developing grown-ups still creating enthusiastic direction and social versatility, these impacts can be especially destructive.

Additionally, the per-formative nature of social media can energize a kind of "relationship exhibitionism," where the quality of a association is judged based on outside approval likes, comments, adherent checks or maybe than inner enthusiastic fulfilment. This may lead to shallow connections or improbable desires approximately closeness and communication. The obscured boundaries between the online and offline universes too raise concerns around advanced assent, security, and the permanence of advanced impressions, all of which have moral suggestions for relationship elements and individual development. Understanding the catalytic part of social media in forming the connections of late teens and adults is fundamental for guardians, teachers, policymakers, and mental wellbeing experts. As these stages gotten to be ever more coordinates into everyday life, the capacity to utilize them strongly and mindfully will ended up a centre social ability. More vitally, this understanding may offer assistance in relieving negative results such as social hostility, computerized reliance, or enthusiastic burnout whereas improving the positive potential of social media to cultivate compassion, inclusivity, and enthusiastic growth.

This study considers points to examine the double nature of social media as both an enabler and a complicator of connections amid these developmental life stages and by examining existing research and user behaviour in Abeokuta North and South local government. It looks for to light up how social media platforms can be outlined, utilized, and controlled in ways that back or maybe than weaken the social advancement of youthful individuals.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In this age where emerging adults and teenagers desire to make virtual friends and explore the world through surfing of Internet, it is important to understand the underlying desires and the awakening of interests in the young adults and teenagers that defy the conventional ways of making and building relationships. The study therefore investigates to what extent social media contributed to quality and impactful relationships among the emerging adults and late teens in Abeokuta North and South Local Governments of Ogun State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions form the basis of investigating the general objectives of this study:

1. What are the emerging adults and late teens do on social media?
2. To what extent are the emerging adults and late teens in Abeokuta North and South use social media for interaction?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In this computerized age, social media has gotten to be a overwhelming channel of interpersonal communication, especially among emerging adults (ages 18–25) and late teenagers (ages 16–19). These age bunches, characterized by personality investigation and expanding independence, depend intensely on computerized stages to frame, keep up, and indeed break down sentimental and dispassionate connections (Arnett, 2000; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). Given the ubiquity and interactivity of social media, understanding how and why people utilize these stages to oversee their social connections requires a theoretical lens that considers user motivation. The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) offers such a focal point by centering on the dynamic part of the group of onlookers in selecting media to satisfy particular needs.

Uses and Gratifications Theory:

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was created in the middle of the 20th century and made popular by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1973, according to Aneato, Onabanjo, and Osifeso (2008) and a number of other academics. According to this theory, media consumers are engaged individuals who choose media sources carefully in order to meet their own needs. UGT stresses the agency of users in their media engagement, concentrating on their psychological and social motivations, in contrast to previous theories that portrayed audiences as passive consumers. Five fundamental presumptions are identified by the theory as explaining this active engagement with media.

The assumptions According to Aneato et al 2008 are:

1. The audience is viewed as active; according to Aneato, S.G., Onabanjo, O.S., and Osifeso, J.B. (2008), viewers are goal-oriented and seek to achieve their aims through media.
2. The connection between need gratification and media choice is largely audience-driven, demonstrating that users have options and select media to meet their needs.
3. Media compete with other sources of satisfaction. Aneato et al. (2008) note that face-to-face communication is a significant alternative that can help individuals effectively address their circumstances.
4. Satisfaction from media use depends on the individual, with goals often stemming from data provided by audience members (Aneato et al., 2008).
5. Value judgments about the cultural significance of mass communication should be set aside to explore audience behaviour. This self-awareness allows users to articulate their motivations for choosing specific media (Aneato et al., 2008).

The Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) is a media-use worldview that investigates how and why people effectively look for out particular media to fulfil specific needs. The theory wandered from the conventional effects-based models by emphasizing the audience's dynamic part in the communication handle (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Or maybe than being detached beneficiaries of media messages, groups of onlookers are depicted as independent operators making consider media choices, This review of the literature explores the several ways in which social media affects the romantic and interpersonal relationships of late adolescents (ages 16–18) and emerging adults (ages 18–25). This review highlights a number of important themes by combining empirical research, psychological theories, and sociocultural analyses. These themes include communication dynamics, identity formation, self-presentation, and the beginning, continuation, and

breakdown of relationships. The effects of dating apps like Tinder and Bumble as well as social media sites like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok and host of others are investigated in relation to intimacy, attachment styles, and conflict. The review also discusses the drawbacks, such as digital infidelity, surveillance, and comparison anxiety. Finally, it emphasises how social media can both support and impede the growth of healthy relationships.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The emergence of social media in the last 20 years has had a significant impact on how people express themselves, communicate, and form relationships. This is especially important for late teens and emerging adults, a developmental stage marked by social expansion, increased autonomy, and identity exploration. Social media is both a reflecting and a shaping force in this situation.
To comprehend broader psychosocial development in digital environments, it is essential to comprehend how these platforms affect romantic and interpersonal relationships.

Emerging adulthood, as defined by Arnett (2000), typically includes individuals aged 18 to 25, a life stage marked by instability, exploration, and a focus on self. Late adolescence, covering ages 16 to 18, precedes this phase and shares many of the same psychosocial challenges, including the navigation of intimacy and peer influence. For the purposes of this review, "social media" refers to platforms used for social interaction and image sharing (such as Instagram and TikTok), ephemeral messaging (like Snapchat), and dating (including Tinder and Bumble).

Social media has transformed communication, business, and social interaction in the 21st century. This study examines the significant role of social media platforms as a whole and their impact on the relationships of emerging adults and late teens, as well as societal norms. While social media promotes global connectivity and democratizes information and psychological well-being, this analysis, through a review of existing research, emphasizes the dual-edged nature of social media and highlights the necessity for balanced regulation and ethical engagement.

Social media encompasses digital platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content, including text, images, and videos (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Since the emergence of platforms such as Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006), social media has experienced exponential growth, boasting over 4.9 billion users worldwide as of 2023 (Statista, 2023). Its widespread influence affects communication, politics, commerce, and culture, thereby reshaping societal dynamics. The effects of social media are complex, underscoring its role in enhancing connectivity and its broader implications for society.

Social Media & Communication

Social media has transformed interpersonal communication by providing instant and borderless platforms for interaction, such as WhatsApp and Instagram, which enable users to sustain relationships over long distances, thereby nurturing a sense of global community (Hampton 2016). For marginalized groups, social media serves as a powerful tool for advocacy, with movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo gaining traction through online activism (Tufekci, 2017). Nevertheless, critics contend that digital communication often replaces face-to-face interactions, which may diminish empathy and exacerbate social isolation (Turkle, 2015). Social media also facilitates the rapid dissemination of information during crises; for instance, Twitter has proven to be an essential communication tool during natural disasters (Fruistino M.A 2018). However, the rapid pace of information sharing can also lead to the spread of misinformation, complicating the public's understanding of events (Rosoughi, S. 2018).

Social Media and Relationship

Communication is essential for building lasting relationships. People of all ages engage in social media, connecting with friends and family and sharing memorable moments regardless of distance. Modern interactions often include photos, videos, and voice notes, with instant responses facilitated by various platforms. It’s uncommon for young adults not to have smartphones, primarily used for connectivity. However, dependence on phones can lead to decreased attention and increased depression, negatively affecting social relationships (Seo et al., 2016).

The internet's acceptance for information exchange has transformed how people communicate, making digital interactions more normalized alongside traditional methods like phone calls or face-to-face conversations. Scholars note that social media impacts relationships in several ways:

1. It helps create new relationships by overcoming offline limitations.

2. It can substitute for and diminish offline relationships.

3. It complements and reinforces existing offline connections (Ellison, N.B, Lampe, C., Stainfield, C. & Vitak, J. 2010).

EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Young individuals extensively engage with social media for a multitude of reasons, making it a fundamental aspect of their daily existence (Bevenson, J.C, Shensa, A., Sidani, J.B, Primack, B.A 2016). The following activities are commonly associated with their social media usage: communication and connectivity, self-expression and creativity, entertainment and content consumption, information and news dissemination, social networking, online learning and education, cultural exchange and global interaction, social activism and awareness, shopping and e-commerce, as well as health and well-being.

Livingstone, Haddon L., Gorzig, A., & Olafisson, K. (2011) have seen that social media has both positive and negative impacts on young people. Connecting to social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, for example, has identity-related effects that provide teenagers and young adults a feeling of acceptance and belonging. Social media helps marginalised groups and individuals communicate with people throughout the world, which is especially important for those who feel alone. Social media also provides young people with peer motivation, positive inspiration, and the encouragement to build morals and healthy behaviours. Teenagers can also discover role models online. Furthermore, identity formation is a significant aspect, as adolescents often seek to establish their identity and place within society, a process that is readily observable on social media platforms. (Sumaderi. S 2023) However, it is crucial to acknowledge that negative consequences such as distal addiction, cyberbullying, online child sexual abuse, and exploitation are prevalent issues associated with social media.
It is essential to recognize that excessive exposure of teenagers and emerging adults to social media can have profound negative implications. If teenagers are to engage with social media, it is imperative that it is done cautiously (Sumaderi, S. 2023).

TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Below are some of the many types of social media platforms used by teenagers and emerging adults for communication and social interactions.

Facebook

Facebook was established by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 and has since evolved into the largest social networking platform globally. Initially a college networking site, Facebook has expanded to incorporate features such as news feeds, groups, and marketplaces, thereby facilitating global connectivity. The algorithm that curates content personalizes the user experience; however, it has faced criticism for fostering echo chambers and reinforcing polarized viewpoints (Periser 2011). Facebook's involvement in political campaigns, particularly during the 2016 US election, underscored its capacity to shape public opinion through targeted advertising and misinformation (Allott & Gentzknow 2017). Despite the controversies surrounding it, Facebook continues to serve as an essential tool for community building, offering features like fundraisers and crisis response that aid disaster relief efforts (Hobbs, W.R 2021). While Facebook strengthens connections among diaspora communities and activists, it also perpetuates issues such as cyberbullying and privacy violations (Boyd 2014). Undoubtedly, it fosters connectivity worldwide, particularly among teenagers and youth, who find it appealing as it supports their social interactions.

Instagram

Instagram, which was acquired by Facebook (now Meta) in 2012, has evolved into a visually driven platform with 2 billion monthly users, focusing primarily on photo and video sharing (Meta 2023). Features such as stories and reels, as well as influencer partnerships, have significantly transformed digital marketing, allowing brands to connect with younger audiences through aesthetic storytelling (Chaffey 2022). The platform also fosters self-expression and identity formation among young users by encouraging the sharing

of images. Moreover, Instagram's algorithm favors engagement-driven content, which often leads to the amplification of trends like "Instagram vs Reality."

Snapchat

Snapchat, launched in 2011, has significantly popularized ephemeral messaging, enabling users to share photos and videos that vanish after being viewed (Bayer, J.B., Ellison, N.B, Schoeenebeck, S.Y. & Falk, E.B 2016). With approximately 750 million monthly users, primarily from Generation Z, Snapchat offers engaging features such as stories, filters, and Snap Map. These elements combine playfulness with real-time location sharing, fostering a unique form of interaction. The platform's emphasis on fleeting communication has reshaped digital communication norms, shifting the focus toward spontaneity rather than curated performances (Vaterlaus, J.M, Barnett. K., Rochal, L., & Young, J.A 2016). Consequently, Snapchat has become a preferred platform for communication among younger generations, facilitating informal and immediate connections.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp, established in 2009 and acquired by Meta in 2014, has evolved into a messaging platform boasting over 2.7 billion users. It is well-known for its end-to-end encryption, which has made it particularly popular in regions such as India and Brazil, where it enables low-cost communication through text, voice notes, and video calls. However, this encryption feature has also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation, including false health claims during the COVID-19 pandemic (Resende, F.M.,Souza, A.M & Lima, R.F, 2019).

The app's group chat functionality, which allows for up to 1,024 members, has become a vital space for community organization and business interactions. WhatsApp serves as an invaluable tool for teenagers and emerging adults in areas with internet access, helping to create, foster, and enhance relationships within these groups (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Despite ongoing security concerns raised by governments regarding its encryption, WhatsApp continues to be an essential resource for diaspora communities, providing affordable cross-border communication.

TikTok

TikTok launched globally in 2017 and has since gained 1.7 billion users, thanks to its algorithmically curated short-form videos (Bytendance 2023). The platform has democratized content creation, allowing marginalized creators to bypass traditional media gatekeepers (Abiden 2021). TikTok's influence on culture is undeniable, reshaping music charts and fashion trends through various challenges.

To nurture relationships on TikTok, consistent interaction is key. Creators engage with their audience through challenges, stitch videos, and live streams. By responding to comments and hosting Q&A sessions, they build a loyal audience and foster a parasocial bond.

Bumble

This social media platform empowers women to make the first move in heterosexual matches, reducing unsolicited advances. Its BFF and B122 modes extend usage to friendship and professional networking. Users create connections through bios and prompts that showcase personality traits, fostering intentional interaction (Adeleke & Yusuf, 2019). Geo-location features support hyper-local relationships, though some critics point out biases in the algorithmic matching.

To nurture relationships, Bumble offers in-app video calls and voice notes for users to deepen their connections before meeting offline. The BFF mode promotes shared activities, while the B122 mode aids mentorship and career growth.

Linkedln

LinkedIn focuses on establishing professional relationships with resume-style profiles and networking tools. Users connect with colleagues, alumni, and industry leaders via personalized invitations based on shared career interests. Emerging adults use LinkedIn for mentorship, internships, and job opportunities through cold outreach, fostering transactional connections (Chukwuemeka & Okeke 2020).

Nurturing professional relationships involves endorsing skills, sharing insights, and engaging with posts. Groups and LinkedIn Learning encourage collaboration, while recommendations build credibility. Overall,

social media platforms offer various tools for initiating and sustaining relationships, from TikTok's creative communities to LinkedIn's professional networks.

Digital Intimacy and the Performance of Romance

Sharing romantic milestones or "couple content" can enhance and solidify relationship narratives, while simultaneously subjecting them to public examination (Carpenter & Spotswood, 2013). This form of external validation has the potential to either fortify connections or induce pressure.

In today's digital landscape, social media has transformed the ways in which intimacy is articulated, experienced, and understood among young adults and late adolescents. Digital intimacy encompasses the emotional and relational closeness fostered through online platforms, frequently facilitated by text messaging, video calls, the sharing of personal content, and public interactions such as likes, comments, and tags. For youth, who are in a pivotal phase of exploring emotional expression and relational dynamics, digital intimacy can act as both a precursor and an enhancement to physical or face-to-face relationships (boyd, 2014).

A significant element of digital intimacy is the public performance of romance, which involves the curated representation of romantic behaviors and relationships online. Through platforms like Instagram and TikTok, young adults and teenagers engage in romantic displays such as anniversary posts, coordinated couple content, or affectionate captions. These visible expressions not only convey love to the partner but also serve as social signals to peers and followers, thereby reinforcing the authenticity and appeal of the relationship (Abidin, 2016). This enactment of romance frequently becomes integrated into the relationship itself, establishing a feedback loop between offline intimacy and online affirmation.

While digital intimacy has the potential to enhance emotional connections, it can also create pressure to adhere to idealized representations of romantic achievement. The continuous exposure to curated and visually appealing relationship content on the internet cultivates a culture of comparison. Consequently, young individuals may form unrealistic expectations regarding the nature of romance, which can adversely impact their satisfaction and emotional well-being in actual relationships (Chou & Edge, 2012). This issue is particularly significant for late adolescents and emerging adults, who are still in the process of shaping their understandings of love, partnership, and relational stability. Moreover, the enactment of digital intimacy can occasionally overshadow authentic connection. Relationships may result into changing from maintaining a specific image to promoting emotional intimacy. The commodification of romance, according to researchers, is caused by the performative nature of social media, where displays of affection are created for an audience rather than for the partner (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Relationship tension may result from this circumstance, especially when people feel pressured to maintain appearances even in the face of disagreement or discontent.

In conclusion, understanding how social media serves as a stimulant for romantic engagement among late adolescents and emerging adults requires an understanding of digital intimacy and the performance of romance. In addition to influencing how relationships are started and maintained, these digital behaviours also have an impact on how love, loyalty, and contentment are interpreted on social media. As a result, studying these phenomena is essential to comprehending how youth relationships are changing in a digitally mediated setting.

Communication in Digital Relationships

Communication serves as a fundamental element in romantic relationships, and with the rise of social media, the dynamics and quality of communication have undergone considerable changes. For young adults and late adolescents, digital platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok offer immediate and ongoing avenues for connection and self-expression. These resources enable continuous and convenient communication that aids in the initiation, maintenance, and at times, the intensification of romantic relationships (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). The capacity to remain in near-constant contact through text messaging, video calls, and social media interactions can foster feelings of intimacy and accessibility, which are essential for romantic development during these formative years.

Both verbal and nonverbal cues, such as emojis, typing indicators, and seen receipts, are included in digital communication and have an impact on how messages are understood and how emotions are expressed. These cues become essential to the emotional language of relationships for many teenagers and young adults, influencing how they interpret feelings of affection, conflict, or insecurity (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). However, the lack of in-person nuances can also lead to miscommunications, especially if tone and intent

are not made clear. Relationship satisfaction and emotional security may be impacted by this problem, which is especially noticeable for people who are still developing their emotional control and communication skills.

The dynamics of romantic relationships are drastically changed by the asynchronous nature of digital communication. Unlike in-person interactions, digital communication allows for selective information sharing, time delays, and the ability to edit messages. This can encourage more thoughtful expression, but it can also result in emotional detachment or performative behaviours. Research suggests that emerging adults may use social media to avoid direct conflict or emotional exposure, frequently using indirect tactics like making vague status updates or acting in a passive-aggressive manner (Fox & Warber, 2014). These actions can erode emotional intimacy and breed doubt about the health or status of a relationship
.
Additionally, social media creates new standards for responsiveness and availability in romantic relationships. Anxieties about commitment, loyalty, or emotional ties can be triggered by being online and not responding, responding slowly, or communicating inconsistently (Hall & Baym, 2012). These dynamics can lead to arguments or feelings of neglect for teenagers and young adults, who usually value immediacy and continuous connectivity in romantic relationships. Social media transparency also makes it possible for partners to watch one another's actions, which can both increase intimacy and spark worries about control, jealousy, or digital surveillance.
In conclusion, communication in online relationships plays a critical role in determining how late adolescents and emerging adults negotiate romance in a social media-dominated world. These platforms can foster intimacy and connection, but they also bring with them new difficulties in managing conflict, expressing emotions, and meeting expectations from others. Understanding these communication dynamics is essential to evaluating how social media can both help and hinder relationships among young people today.

Ambiguity and Misinterpretation

Miscommunication frequently occurs when digital messages lack body language and tone. GIFs and emojis try to fill this gap, but they can't completely replace nonverbal clues (Derks, D.,Fischer., A.H & Bos, A.E 2008). Ambiguity and misinterpretation have emerged as significant issues in the context of relationships made possible by social media, especially for late teens and emerging adults. Because these age groups are increasingly depending on digital platforms to establish and sustain romantic relationships, the lack of context and non-verbal cues in online interactions often results in misinterpretations of intent, interest, and commitment. Social media interactions are more subject to subjective interpretations than face-to-face communication, which raises questions regarding the nature and status of relationships (Walther, 1996).
The inforal and disjointed character of online interactions frequently contributes to this ambiguity in digital communication. Typically, messages are short, informal, and accompanied by pictures or emojis that can convey conflicting or ambiguous emotional signals (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Misreading tone, overanalysing pauses or delays, and misinterpreting the meaning of actions like liking a post or watching a story can result from this. These ambiguities can encourage insecurity, jealousy, and emotional instability in romantic situations for late teens and emerging adults who are still developing their relational expectations and emotional literacy.
Social media blurs the lines and definitions of romantic involvement, introducing a unique kind of relational ambiguity. Words like "almost relationships," "situationships," and "talking stage" draw attention to how many digitally mediated connections are ambiguous and dynamic. Without open discussions about commitment, many young people experience emotional intimacy without fully comprehending the nature of the relationship, which leads to misplaced expectations and feelings of betrayal when interpretations differ.
The curated nature of social media, which frequently hides the actual state of a relationship behind romanticised online representations, adds to this ambiguity. Uneven communication patterns, in which one partner may be more expressive or responsive than the other, also exacerbate the problem. Inconsistencies like reading messages without responding, responding slowly, or occasionally engaging with the public on social media can be mistaken for emotional withdrawal or lack of interest. Relationships may end too soon as a result of these dynamics, which can cause overanalysing and increased anxiety. These misconceptions can obstruct the development of healthy relationships for late teens and emerging adults, who might not have developed conflict resolution skills.
In conclusion, romantic experiences in the digital age are significantly shaped by ambiguity and misinterpretation. Given how important social media is to young people's relationship lives, it is crucial to comprehend how communication ambiguities affect emotional outcomes. In order to successfully navigate romantic relationships in digitally mediated environments, this framework emphasises the significance of intentionality, clarity, and emotional competence.

2.3.11 Relationship Maintenance

The actions and tactics people take to preserve and improve emotional ties, contentment, and stability in their romantic relationships are collectively referred to as relationship maintenance. Social media has drastically changed how these maintenance behaviours are expressed and controlled for late adolescents and emerging adults. Traditional methods such as reassurance, communication, and conflict resolution are frequently executed through digital platforms, including texting, sharing memories, reacting to stories, or sending affectionate emojis (Stafford, 2011). Although these interactions may be subtle, they are essential in affirming relational commitment and emotional presence in the contemporary digital landscape.
Social media platforms function not only as communication mediums but also as public arenas where relationship maintenance is both personal and performative. For example, sharing content related to one's partner, commenting on each other's posts, or publicly recognizing anniversaries serve dual functions: they foster the romantic connection and publicly affirm the relationship to peers (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). This visibility-driven maintenance can bolster a sense of relational legitimacy among young individuals; however, it may also impose pressure to portray an idealized version of the relationship, even in the presence of private conflicts. Consequently, social media both facilitates and complicates the endeavour to sustain relationships during the emotionally pivotal stages of adolescence and early adulthood.

Furthermore, the upkeep of relationships through social media is shaped by the regularity, consistency, and tone of online interactions. Frequent check-ins, loving messages, and prompt communication contribute to the preservation of emotional intimacy, especially in long-distance or less physically present relationships (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Nevertheless, excessive dependence on digital platforms can obstruct profound communication and diminish chances for significant, in-person conflict resolution. For young adults and late adolescents who may still be acquiring relational boundaries and communication abilities, it is crucial to comprehend how to balance digital and face-to-face maintenance techniques for the sake of healthy and lasting romantic growth.

METHODOLOGY

The method to be used in this study is descriptive data analysis. The study will use descriptive statistic to analyse the data gathered. Descriptive statistic is a branch of applied statistic, it is also the term given to the analysis for data that helps to describe, show and summarizes data in a meaningful way. Simple percentiles and mean of the data gathered will be used to determine the outcome of the findings. Means that is below 2.5 in any if the items will be consider rejected while means from 2.5 upward will be accepted.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in order of research question raised. Each is followed with the interpretation of the results.

TABLE 1

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

What are the emerging adult and late teens do on social media?

S/N	QUESTIONS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	MEAN	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	Social media allows me to make new friends	25.5	38.4		19.9	16.3	2.5375	1.66001	ACCEPTED
2.	Social media allows me to get information on what is going on around the world	42.1	20.4	2.2	13.3	20.6	2.6311	1.45626	ACCEPTED
3.	Social media allows me to interact with others on my studies	36.8	20.6	6.0	25.5	19.7	2.9513	1.56698	ACCEPTED
4.	Social media allows me to start relationship early	6.2	14.0	9.7	33.7	36.3	3.7996	1.24153	ACCEPTED
5.	Social media allows me to get unsolicited information	14.2	23.2	9.7	38.0	14.8	3.1592	1.32339	ACCEPTED
6.	I use social media to kill boredom	15.5	37.6	3.7	18.5	24.5	2.9888	1.47266	ACCEPTED

FIELD SURVEY, 2025

The table 1 item 1 above shows responses to how social media allows them to make new friends.38.4 % of the sample agrees that social media does allow them and 25.5% strongly agree to that. 16.3% strongly disagree to that view. The item 2 above shows responses to how social media allows them to get information from what is going on around the world. 42.1% strongly agreed to that and 1.3 % strongly disagree to it. The item 3 above shows responses to how social medial allow them to relate with others on their studies 26.8% strongly agree while 25.5% disagree to that view. The item 4 above show responses to how social media allow them to start relationship early, 36.3% strongly disagree while 6.3 agree to the view. The item 5 above shows responses to how social media allows them to get unsolicited information. 38.0% disagree while 23.2% agree to the view The item 6 above show responses on how social media is used to kill boredom .37.6%agree while 24.5%strongly disagree to the view.

TABLE 2

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

To what extent do emerging adult and late teens of Abeokuta South and North of Ogun State use social media for interaction and connection?

S/N	QUESTIONS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	MEAN	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Social media allows me to express myself better than face-to-face.	17.8	36.1	4.9	20.4	20.8	2.9026	1.4502	ACCEP TED
2.	Social media allows me to share private information with my friend	22.5	35.2	3.9	21.7	16.7	2.7491	1.4407	ACCEP TED
3.	I use social media to share private information with my friend	17.2	34.3	4.5	23.4	20.6	2.9588	1.44641	ACCEP TED

4.	The extent to which I use social media is	24.5	33.3	2.2	22.3	17.6	2.7509	1.47771	ACCEPTED
5.	I am connected with my friends through social media	14.0	28.1	7.5	27.0	23.2	3.1779	1.42485	ACCEPTED
6.	The level at which I make friends on social media is	16.3	31.8	10.3	30.1	11.4	2.8858	1.31097	ACCEPTED

FIELD SURVEY, 2025

The table 2 item 1 above shows response to how social media allow them to express themselves better than face-to- face communication.36.1% agreed and 20.8% strongly disagree to that view. Item 2 above shows response to how social media allows them to share private information to their friends.35.2% agree while 16.7% strongly disagree to the view. The item 3 above shows responses on how they are allowed to shared private information their friends .34,6% agree to that view while 20.6% strongly disagree. The item 4 above shows responses on the extent to which they use social media to interact.23.4% agreed while 34.3% are high in their use of social media. The item 4 above shows response on social media allow them to start relationship early. 33.3% agreed while 17.5% disagree. The item 5 above show responses on how they get connected to social media. 28.1% agree while 23.2% strongly disagree to the view. The item 6 above shows responses to the level at which teens and emerging adult make friends on social media.31.8% agreed while 11.4% strongly disagree in their view

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from the survey show that students from the study are within the age 14 to 24 years and everyone has access to internet facility at one time or the other. Students may be constraint in assessing but they all do have access. The first research question asked of what the emerging adult and late teens are doing on social media. In attending to these questions, six different questions raised in the research instruments and results are as follows: 58.9% agree making friends on social media while 36.2% disagree on this and 4.9 are undecided. The teen and emerging adult also have 62.5% who agree to the fact that they get information around the world using social media while 33.9% did not agree to that. 2.2% are undecided. The findings also show that 47.4% agree that they interact with others on their studies with social medial while 45.2% did not agree and 6.0% are undecided. Findings also show that 20.2 % agree that social media allow them to start relationship early while 70.0% disagree and 9.7 are undecided. Social media allow teens and emerging adults to access unsolicited information. 37.4% agree to this while 52.8% disagree to this. 9.7% are undecided .53.1% also agree that social media is used to kill boredom while 43.0%v disagree, 3.67 are undecided.

In summary to the research question one, we have the mean of 3.17 and this shows that social media allows the teen and emerging adult to do several things.

Research question two investigate to what extent do emerging adult and late teens in Abeokuta South and North use social media for interaction. In attending to this question, a range of investigation reveal the following: 53.9% agree that social media allow them to express themselves better than face to face and 41.2% disagree to that. 4.9% are undecided on this view. 57.7% also agree that social media allow them to share private information on social media while 38.4% disagree but 3.9% are undecided. Also, 57.8% of these set agree that they use social media at a very high rate while 39.9% said they are on a low rete but 2.2% also are undecided. The findings also show that 42.1 % of the teen agree that they are mainly connected with their friends on social media while 50.2% disagree and 7.5% are undecided. In making friends through the use of social media, 48.1% of the teen and emerging adult agree that social media aid making friends' while 41. 5% dis agree to this. 10.3% are undecided.

1n summary to this research question, the mean to this finding is 3.0 and suggest that teen and emerging adults are making use of social media for several of reasons which include making of friends, interactions and many more. More than 50% of then spend more time on social media.

SUMMARY

In summary, study on social media as a catalyst for emerging adults and late teens relationship has helped us to understand the private moment of young adults and late teens. A number of teenagers are using social media for advancing their studies but a good number of them do not use social media for the purpose of advancing their studies. The study also reveal that many adult as a result of using social media started visiting adult site which is counterproductive. This habit is going to adversely affect their live, social media has been revealed in the study that it does not really impact the academic life of the young star positively. Young ones are engaging on social media mainly for making friends, posting videos, watching movies and social interacting.

CONCLUSSION

The study on social media as a catalyst for emerging adults and late teen's relationship: a study of Abeokuta North and South local government in Ogun State of Nigeria has shown that social media is both positive and negative. As teenagers and emerging adults can benefit immensely from the use of social media, they can also be submerged in the dark side or negative side of the use of social media. Emerging adult and late teens are in their formative age and this age is often characterized with identity formation, conflict about self-identity and character formation. It is a stage where young ones need to be guided to make right decision and if they are not properly guided, it is almost certain that they will take the downward trend with the age where everything is taught on social media.

Social media can be used to advance the study of teens and emerging adult as we saw in the study. Although a very small percentage of the respondent are using social media for Academic purposes while a lot of the students don't even do that. This use is very positive and should be encourage among the teenagers and young adults. We also saw from the study that a good number of student are using social media to waste valuable time, watching videos and messaging their virtual friends.

It is therefore established from the study that social media is like a two-edged sword, it will function perfectly where ever it is directed. Parents, guidance and school administrators should be aware that teenagers and emerging adults are too young to make decisive decision and therefore be guided.

RECOMMENDATION

1. In light of the findings above, it is recommended that educational institutions should be proactive in making sure that late teens and emerging adults are helped to find positive way of using social media.
2. Students should be encouraged to use social media for learning and skill acquisition rather than making of friends and killing boredom or whiling away useful time alone.
3. Parents and guardian also should be very careful in monitoring the kids and site they visit.
4. It is also recommended that late teens and emerging adults are monitored in order to reduce the time spend on social media. This study shows that some of them have changed characters. They often get involve with older people on social media who possibly manipulate or introduce them to some vices and thereby influence them negatively

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