Usage of Social Media as a Tool for Eradicating Drug Abuse among University Undergraduates in Nigeria

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Abstract

The prevalence of drug abuse among university undergraduates in Nigeria has reached alarming levels in recent years as the majority of Nigerian students knowingly or unknowingly rely on drugs for a variety of daily tasks. This paper examined the usage of social media as a tool for eradicating drug abuse among university undergraduates in Nigeria. The objectives of this paper are to investigate the frequency of social media usage in creating awareness of drug abuse, the extent to which social media is used to eradicate drug abuse and the effectiveness of the usage of social media to eradicate drug abuse among university undergraduates. Social learning theory was used for this study, while a questionnaire was used to retrieve data from 400 undergraduate respondents from the University of Ilorin and Kwara State University. Findings showed that most of the respondents were not exposed to social media messages on the eradication of drug abuse; instead, they were exposed more to content that encouraged and lured undergraduates into drug abuse, as they were able to recall some of the drugs exposed to on social media. Further findings revealed that most of the respondents feel social media have not done enough to curb drug abuse among undergraduates but believe appropriate sanctions and restrictions on individuals and contents that promote the consumption of drugs could help to reduce drug abuse to the barest minimum. It recommends that social media should be used as a platform to intensify public awareness campaigns against drug abuse; also, education on drug abuse in the universities should be initiated, as well as encouraging undergraduates to join drug-free clubs.

Keywords: Social media usage, Drug abuse, Eradication, Undergraduates, Social media

Introduction

Social media refers to interactive computer-mediated technologies that enable individuals to create and share content through virtual communities and networks, including ideas, professional interests, and other forms of expression. Jena (2019) claims that social media has become such an integral part of undergraduates' lives that it is now a means of communication that has influenced their opinions, actions, and participation in certain activities that suggest addiction. According to Jena (2019), students typically favourably use social media. Jena (2019) notes that programs to discourage students from using alcohol, marijuana, and other substances are promoted on social media sites like X, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

In a similar vein, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2013) notes that social media has developed into a means of attracting students' attention due to its observed influence on behaviour. According to research conducted in 2013 by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, students use social media to promote drug and alcohol use. Therefore, there is a need to use the same strategies to discourage drug and alcohol use in order to promote recovery. According to Amanda (2012), drug usage has become a significant concern among Nigerian first-year university students, posing serious risks to both individual well-being and the larger social fabric.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2021) asserts that several factors, such as peer pressure, socioeconomic difficulties, and a lack of knowledge about the possible repercussions of drug misuse, have contributed to the rise in substance abuse in Nigerian universities. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2021) further noted that social media has become a powerful instrument in the fight against drug abuse, increasing awareness and creating a supportive online community.

The prevalence of drug abuse among university undergraduates in Nigeria has reached alarming levels in recent years. A multitude of substances, ranging from prescription drugs to illicit narcotics, are being misused, leading to adverse effects on physical health, mental well-being, and academic performance. The

consequences extend beyond the individual, affecting families, communities, and the overall progress of the nation.

Moreover, Oliha (2014) reveals that the main issues and reasons behind the persistence of drug abuse in university settings include a general lack of knowledge and instruction about the risks associated with substance abuse, restricted access to counselling and support services, the societal stigma that keeps people from getting help, and the pervasive influence of peer pressure. Furthermore, because drug addiction is generally a covert activity, it might be challenging for authorities to put support and prevention procedures in place (Oliha, 2014).

According to Oliha (2014), these difficulties highlight the need for creative and approachable strategies to reach and engage the target audience. According to Amanda (2012), well-planned social media initiatives about drug usage have the potential to increase public awareness, question established standards, and offer a virtual network of support to those who are struggling with substance abuse problems.

One of the societal evils that plague Nigeria's teenage population nowadays is drug usage. According to a 2008 report by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, drug usage is becoming a part of Nigerian student culture. According to Ajibutu (2014), students in Nigeria are particularly susceptible to the negative effects of hard drugs on their communities. Young people between the ages of 14 and 25 make up the majority of those who consume drugs; pupils in this age range may experience academic difficulties (Akpokiniovo, 2022).

According to Samuel, George, Ogbu, Agaba, and Yisa (2020), the majority of Nigerian students knowingly or unknowingly rely on drugs for a variety of daily tasks, including hallucinogens, lysergic acid, marijuana or Indian hemp, and tranquillizers. According to Whyte, Torre, Barker, and Gourley (2018), the consequences of this abuse can include school abandonment, depression, loneliness, suicide, bullying, violence, stealing, vandalism, poor academic

performance, accidents, injuries, aggressive sexual behaviour, and even lifelong addiction.

Therefore, previous literature Ajibutu (2014); Jena (2019); Akpokiniovo, 2022) and Oliha (2014) have established the prevalence of drug abuse among undergraduates and the effect of such abuse; however, there are limited studies on the usage of social media as a tool for eradicating drug abuse among university undergraduates in Nigeria. This is the gap this study attempts to fill by also examining the following objectives:

i. Investigate the frequency of social media usage in creating awareness of drug abuse among university undergraduates.
ii. To find out the extent to which social media is used to eradicate drug abuse among students
iii. Observe the effectiveness of the usage of social media to eradicate drug abuse among university undergraduates.

Literature review

Toyin and Queen (2023) observed the assessment of social media exposure and substance abuse among adolescent secondary school students in Delta State. The objective was to explore the relationship between social media exposure and substance abuse among adolescent secondary school students in Delta State. The study adopted the correlation method of ex-post facto research design. The target population was all public secondary school students in the 25 local government areas of Delta State, with a sample size of 500 students from the three Senatorial Districts in Delta State.

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between social media and substance abuse among adolescent students. Also, school type has a significant moderating impact on the relationship between social media and substance abuse among adolescent students in secondary schools in Delta State. Based on the findings, it was concluded that social media correlated with substance abuse among adolescent secondary school students. At the same time, it was recommended that parents, educators and members of the community should monitor and guide the students on the appropriate use of social media in order to reduce its effect on substance abuse by adolescent students.

Aribamikan (2021) examined the role of social media in reducing the prevalence of substance abuse among secondary school students in the Ikere local government area of Ekiti State. A total of 360 persons were included in the sample. It was found that there was a significant relationship between social media and substance use. Findings also showed that there was a significant influence of social media on sensitizing the students about the risk of substance use and creating awareness of the health implications of substance use. It recommended that information, programmes and podcasts that dissuade teenagers and adolescents from substance abuse should be made to go viral on social media, and any information on substance abuse to be passed across to teenagers and adolescents in society should be made through social media platforms as a more significant percentage of teenagers are social media users.

Furthermore, Constantine (2022) reveals that nearly all the geo-political zones of Nigeria contribute to this menace in one way or another. For instance, Constantine (2022) mentions that 20% of the school population in Edo state, Nigeria, have taken a psychoactive drug once in their lives; substance abusers in the Northwest accounted for 37.47 per cent of the nation's drug victims; south-west, 17.32 percent; South East: 13.5 per cent; North Central,11.71 percent and North East, 8.54 percent. Apart from cannabis, Constantine (2022) maintains that there is a growing abuse of synthetic drugs that were once strange to the Nigerian environment, which includes but are not limited to amphetamine, cocaine, heroin, glue, methamphetamine, paint thinner, cement, animal excreta, spirit, cough syrup made with codeine and so on.

Kazeem and John (2017) say the involvement of Nigerian students in drug abuse has taken a wide and frightening dimension. Studies conducted by Okafor et al. (2022) observe that students between the ages of 13 – 35 years constitute the high-risk group for drug abuse in society. Also, Okafor et al. (2022) revealed that the vulnerable groups to drug abuse include students, the unemployed, artisans (artisans), commercial sex workers, long-distance drivers, and street children.

Drug Abuse

The habitual use of drugs for reasons other than therapy, mood modification, or altered state of consciousness is referred to as drug abuse. It is an unhelpful drug or substance use pattern that may have adverse social, legal, professional, or health effects. Abdul (2023) defines drug abuse as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. According to Abdul (2023), typical examples of psychoactive substances include alcohol, cocaine, opium, cannabinoids, amphetamines, sedatives and hypnotics. Anxiolytics and other stimulants like caffeine, hallucinogens, nicotine, volatile solvents and phencyclidine are also classified as psychoactive substances. Abdul (2023) notes that herbs, leaves and plants have been used to heal and control diseases since early times. The use of drugs in itself does not constitute any danger when correctly administered.

However, Samuel et al. (2020) reveal that drug obsession and addiction among students has become one of the nauseating problems confronting Nigerian society as this poses significant social, economic, and psychological problems in the country. Again, Samuel et al. (2020) say that the majority of Nigerian students ignorantly depend on one form of drug or another for their various daily activities and are increasingly abusing and experimenting with hard drugs like heroin and cocaine. Other substances like Indian hemp, which is frequently produced in Nigeria, as well as Methamphetamine and tablets with codeine capable of intoxicating are primarily found on university campuses (Samuel et al., 2020)

Social Media and Drug Abuse Eradication

Social media serves as a powerful platform for sensitizing university students in Nigeria about the perils of drug abuse. By leveraging popular social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, and X, and educational platforms like LinkedIn, a targeted campaign can be designed to disseminate informative content. Abdul (2023) says strategic use of engaging visuals, info-graphics, and videos can capture the attention of the tech-savvy student population, effectively conveying the consequences of drug abuse. Similarly, collaborations with influencers, local celebrities, and health professionals can amplify the campaign's reach and credibility. Constantine (2022) further reveals that creating and

promoting dedicated hashtags can foster community around the cause, encouraging students to share their insights and experiences.

Additionally, Kazeem and John (2017) believe live sessions, webinars, and online forums can facilitate direct interaction, allowing experts to address queries and share evidence-based information. Kazeem and John (2017) maintain that by utilizing the pervasive influence of social media, universities can effectively sensitize their student body, fostering a culture of awareness and resilience against the scourge of drug abuse. Regardless Jena (2019) observes that there is a relationship between social media use and substance abuse among student's people. Similarly Jena (2019) argue that students who use social media were more likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana than students who do not use social media, and risk was higher for those who had seen pictures of students using or passed out from alcohol or drugs.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Social Learning Theory propounded by a psychologist, Albert Bandura, in the 1960s. In 1986, it was improved upon and renamed social cognitive theory. The theory believes behaviour is learned by observation, identification and imitation, sometimes assisted by re-enforcement. This theory is in line with the indirect influence of social media platforms, which celebrities and personalities can use to sensitise young people against drug abuse or substance consumption, which could be injurious to their health and society.

Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design. This kind of research design makes it easier to collect data in an organized manner. This design focuses on observing and describing the characteristics of a phenomenon or the relationship between variables. The primary goal is to provide an accurate and detailed account of what is happening without manipulating variables.

Population of the study

The population of this study comprised undergraduates in two public universities in Kwara State: the University of Ilorin, with an undergraduate population of 48,000 across the fourteen faculties and Kwara State University, with an

undergraduate population of 20,000 in the seven faculties. These two universities' total population of undergraduates is 68,000 (Source: Admission Office, 2023). A purposive sampling technique selected six faculties (three each) from these universities. Taro Yamane's 1973 Sampling formula was used to determine a sample size of 400 respondents for the study.

Procedure

A self-structured, closed-ended questionnaire was designed for this study. It contains 12 items designed in line with the research objectives formulated for this study. With each variable generating three optional items, the questionnaire used a Yes/No question format to elicit responses from respondents. In order to validate the instrument for this study, face and construct validity was conducted by two experts in the field of Mass Communication. Based on their observation, the instrument was structured to proffer data on the subject under investigation. Also, the reliability of the instrument was ascertained using split half method. One of the schools that did not form part of the study was used, and the instrument was administered to 20 randomly selected respondents. The data generated were analyzed using inferential statistics and Spearman-Brown's formula. The coefficient (r) of 0.71 was obtained. Of the 400 copies of questionnaires administered to participants, 352 were retrieved and found suitable for data analysis. Thus, the response rate was 96.75%. The data collected were coded using Statistical Product Service Solution (SPSS) version 22.0 and subsequently analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency tables and percentages.

Result

Table1

Demographics of Respondents **(n=387)**

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	137	35.4
	Male	250	64.5
	16-20	205	52.9
Age	21-25	104	26.8
	26-30	78	20.1
Marital status	Single	298	77.00

	Married	89	22.9
Level	100-200	195	50.3
	300-400	89	22.9
	500	103	26.6
Religion	Christianity	201	51.9
Total	Islam	186	48.0
		387	100.0

The table above indicates that there were more male participants in the study, with 64.5% as against the female participants. Also, respondents between the age of 16-20 participated majorly in the study, with 52.9%. Most of the respondents were single and in between 100 and 200 levels of study.

Table2

***Frequency of social media usage to create awareness on drug abuse* (n=387)**

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
How often have you been exposed to social media messages against drug abuse?	Often	88	22.7
	Occasionally	69	17.8
	Not at all	230	59.4
What type of drugs taken by addicts have you been exposed to on social media?	Cocaine	79	20.4
	Marijuana	56	14.4
	Codeine	58	14.9
	Thebans	64	16.5
	Morphine	52	13.4
	Tranquilizers	36	9.3
	Heroine	42	10.8
Do you personally know anyone taking drugs?	Yes	306	79.0
	No	81	20.9
Have you ever been offered	Yes	285	73.6

drugs?	No	102	26.3
If you were offered drugs, would you them?	Yes	187	48.3
	No	203	52.4
Why do you think student take drugs?	Idleness	40	10.3
	Depression	55	14.2
	Peer pressure	206	53.2
	Family disintegration	86	22.2
Total		387	100.0

The table above examined the frequency of social media usage to create awareness against drug abuse. This result implies that in the table above, the majority of undergraduates are not exposed to social media messages that discourage the consumption of drugs among young people. As shown Marjory of the respondents with a percentage of 59.4% claimed that they have not been exposed to any of such messages on social media. Findings also showed that the majority of the respondents were exposed to Cocaine and Thebans on social media. The majority of the respondents also claimed that they know someone close to them personally taking drugs, and the majority said they have been offered drugs before now. On the reason why students take drugs, respondents believed it could be as a result of peer pressure and followed by family disintegration.

Table3

***Extent social media is used to eradicate drug abuse*(n=387)**

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Do social media educate and enlighten young people about abstinence from drug?	Yes	81	20.9
	No	306	79.0

Have social media done enough in the fight against drug abuse?	Yes	67	17.3
	No	320	82.6
Have social media awareness messages about drug abuse reduced the unlawful use of drug in the society among youth?	Yes	128	33.0
	No	259	66.9
Do you feel social media contents on drug encourage student to engage in drug abuse?	Yes	309	79.8
	No	78	20.1
Total		387	100.0

Table three examines the extent to which social media is used to eradicate drug abuse among undergraduates. Findings showed that the majority of the respondents (79.0%) do not believe that social media have enlightened young people about abstinence from drug abuse. The majority of the respondents (82.6%) also feel that social media have not done enough in the fight against drug abuse. Similarly, more of the respondents disclosed that the social media awareness messages about drug abuse have not reduced the unlawful use of the drug among youths in society. The result also showed that more respondents feel social media content encourages students to engage in drug abuse.

Table4
***Effectiveness of social media in the eradication of drug abuse among undergraduates*(n=387)**

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Do you consider social media as an effective channel to eradicate drug abuse among undergraduates?	Yes	128	33.0
	No	259	66.9
Do you feel sanction on social media contents encouraging drug consumption will reduce the rate of drug abuse among undergraduates?	Yes	309	79.8
	No	78	20.1
Do you think that the university management? Is doing enough to combat drug abuse?	Yes	260	67.1
	No	127	32.8
Total		387	100.0

The table investigates the effectiveness of social media in the eradication of drug abuse among undergraduates. Results showed that most respondents do not consider social media as an effective channel to eradicate drug abuse among undergraduates. Also, most respondents believed that if sanctions are placed on social media content that encourages drug consumption, it will reduce the rate of drug abuse among undergraduates. Meanwhile, most respondents feel their respective university management is doing enough to curtail the abuse of drugs by undergraduates.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of this paper is to observe the frequency of social media usage in creating awareness of the health implications of drug abuse among university undergraduates. It was discovered that the majority of the respondents had not been exposed to social media content that sensitised the public against the abuse of drugs, particularly among the youths. Instead, respondents recalled that they are majorly exposed to drug substances on social media. As recalled, these drugs are Cocaine, Marijuana, Thebans, Tranquilizers and Heroine. Thus, these findings imply that there are insufficient messages on social media discouraging the consumption of drugs. This result supports the assertion of Jena (2019), who claimed that social media has become such an integral part of undergraduates' lives that it has influenced their opinions, actions, and participation in certain activities that suggest addiction. Inline, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2013) reveals that students use social media to promote drug and alcohol use. Further findings revealed that respondents also claimed that they know someone close to them personally taking drugs, and the majority said they had been offered drugs before now. On the reason why students take drugs, respondents believed it could be as a result of peer pressure and followed by family disintegration. Hence, the need to use the same medium to discourage drug abuse is paramount.

The second objective examined the extent to which social media is used to eradicate drug abuse among students. Findings showed that most respondents disagreed that social media had enlightened undergraduates about abstinence from drug abuse. The majority of the respondents feel that social media has not done enough in the fight against drug abuse. Similarly, more of the respondents disclosed that the social media awareness messages about drug abuse had not reduced the unlawful use of drugs among undergraduates. The result also showed that more respondents feel social media content encourages students to engage in drug abuse. The result reechoes the assumption of the Social Learning theory that behaviour is learned by observation, identification and imitation, sometimes assisted by re-enforcement. Suppose there are insufficient messages on social media discouraging the consumption of drugs. In that case, subscribers may be influenced otherwise by their exposure to the consumption of drugs on social media, as Jena (2019) argued that there is a relationship between social media use

and substance abuse among students. Jena (2019) maintains that students who use social media are more likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana than students who do not use social media.The last objective examined the effectiveness of the usage of social media to eradicate drug abuse among university undergraduates. Findings showed that most respondents do not consider social media as an effective channel to eradicate drug abuse among undergraduates. Also, most respondents believed that if sanctions are placed on social media content that encourages drug consumption, it will reduce the rate of drug abuse among undergraduates. Meanwhile, most respondents feel their respective university management is doing enough to curtail the abuse of drugs by undergraduates. Findings align with Samuel et al. (2020), who observe that the majority of Nigerian students knowingly or unknowingly rely on drugs for a variety of daily tasks, including hallucinogens, lysergic acid, marijuana or Indian hemp, and tranquillizers. Thus, the consequences of this abuse can include school abandonment, depression, loneliness, suicide, bullying, violence, stealing, vandalism, poor academic performance, accidents, injuries, aggressive sexual behaviour, and even lifelong addiction. Since experts have established the influence of social media, the same medium can also be used to sensitize against drug abuse.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the usage of social media as a tool for eradicating drug abuse among university undergraduates. Findings indicate that most of the respondents were not exposed to social media messages on the eradication of drug abuse; instead, they were exposed more to content that encouraged and lured undergraduates into drug abuse. Most respondents recalled some of the drugs frequently exposed to on social media to be Cocaine, Marijuana, Thebans, Tranquilizers and heroin. They felt social media had not done enough to curb drug abuse among youths. However, they felt appropriate sanctions and restrictions on individuals and contents that promote the consumption of drugs could help to reduce drug abuse to the barest minimum. Drug abuse harms the health of any institution, especially among youths in institutions of higher learning. Social media as a vehicle of information has an enormous task to help combat this scourge. The war against drug abuse can only be won with the concerted efforts of the management of the universities, the government at all levels and citizens by

discouraging the daily bombardment of drug abuse content on social media. Therefore, This study recommends that social media intensify public awareness campaigns against drug abuse through drama, skits, symposiums, and lectures. Also, education on drug abuse in the universities should be initiated, as well as encouraging undergraduates to join drug-free clubs. The government should establish more counselling and rehabilitation Centers in the country. This will provide a therapeutic environment that allows the proper handling of drug addiction cases.

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