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Influence of Social Media Content on Risky Sexual Behaviours of Undergraduate Students in Selected Universities in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract:
With social media platforms being easily accessible through phones, the youth all over the globe, including those of Kiambu County, are easily exposed to unregulated content. From this, the issues of problematic content exposure and exposure to unnecessary content, such as sexual advertising and marketing content, arise. This study seeks to evaluate the influence of social media content on risky sexual behaviours of undergraduate students in selected universities in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study utilised a descriptive research design. The target population was 110,500 undergraduate students in the eight public and private universities with main campuses domiciled in Kiambu County. The sample size for the study was 399 undergraduate students. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of the statistical package for social scientists, version 26.0. Descriptive statistics comprise frequencies and percentages, while inferential statistics use regression analysis. The study found a positive significant relationship between risky sexual behaviours and social media content. The study recommends that awareness campaigns on social media use and social media literacy programmes should be further enhanced. This will equip university students with critical skills in the responsible use of social media platforms. Students will also be equipped with skills to gauge different content on social media platforms and the way risky behaviours are advanced through social media platforms.

Keywords: Content, risky sexual behaviours, social media, undergraduate

1. Introduction

Among youths, sexual risk behaviour is currently a serious public health issue for many countries all over the world. Within impoverished nations experiencing systematic corruption and endemic poverty, this behaviour among youths is even more pronounced. In a United Nations report, it is shown that almost 800,000 adolescent girls aged between 15 and 19 are impregnated yearly, with the majority of the pregnancies being unintentional (World Health Organization, WHO, 2017). At the same time, 50% of more than 19 million sexually transmitted infections are recorded yearly among adolescents/youths aged between 15 and 24 years. Serious attention has been accorded internationally to understanding predictors of these outcomes among youth. Despite the numerous economic, public health, and social consequences (Fidelis, 2016).

Understanding risky sexual behaviours among adolescents and youths, more so undergraduates is increasingly necessary (Scull *et al.,* 2020). Identification of risk factors for risky sexual behaviours among youths, as well as strategies for preventing them, is a potential approach to handling this risky behaviour (Marengo *et al.,* 2019). Crucial communication avenues and platforms among youths are social media and technology. These avenues are upgraded annually, with millions of youths utilising them. Currently, WhatsApp, Facebook, X, Instagram, Telegram, Snap Chat, Bingo Live, YouTube, TikTok, and WeChat are among the most popular social networking platforms among the youth. Facebook, YouTube and X have the lion's share of youthful social media users (Dar & Nagrath, 2023). For decades now, academicians have recognised social media as capable of serving dysfunctional and functional roles (Owan & Robert, 2019; Arop, Agunwa & Owan, 2019).

With youth in universities having smartphones, the issue of risky sexual behaviours has become rampant among the youth around the world. This is due to the ease of access to social media platforms that make them vulnerable to different vices (Arsad, Mia & Daud, 2020). Content analysis of social media networking platforms depicts the platforms as full of sexual content ranging from flirting, sexual intercourse, and photos to videos displaying risky sexual behaviours or behaviours that may expose an individual to indulge in irresponsible sexual behaviours (Negriff, 2019). The social media platforms also provide an opportunity for the youth to create and post sexual content, thus displaying information about their sexuality, demonstrating their orientations and interests in sexual matters, posting content on their sexual experiences and sharing explicit pictures and videos of their own in addition to posting one's practices and experiences on sexual matters (Agbodo, 2022). Established social media platforms tend to influence their user's sexual activities and acts

by regularly exposing them to explicit sexual materials, not to mention offering particular sexual behaviour information (Quincy & Manduza, 2021).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

With social media platforms being easily accessible through phones, the youth all over the globe, including those of Kiambu County, are easily exposed to unregulated content. For instance, global statistics demonstrate that approximately 75% of the youth utilising social media platforms access content that they would not desire their parents to know about (Bozzola *et al.,* 2022). Out of these, more than half proceed to form relationships or engage in intimate relationships and sexual behaviours that expose them to dangers such as STDs and unwanted pregnancies. From this, the issues of problematic content exposure and exposure to unnecessary content, such as sexual advertising and marketing content, arise. In addition, studies such as Odhiambo, Mbwayo and Tucholsky (2020) indicate that social media use among university students has reached addictive levels. The study found that the focus of previous scholars on the influence of social media content on sexual behaviours was scanty. Therefore, the current study seeks to evaluate the influence of social media content on risky sexual behaviours of undergraduate students in selected universities in Kiambu County, Kenya.

1.2. Research Hypothesis

- H_0: Social media content has no statistically significant influence on risky sexual behaviours of undergraduate students in selected universities in Kiambu County, Kenya.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

A descriptive research design proposed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) was used to carry out this study. Through a descriptive research design, the researcher investigates and describes the present phenomenon in a study.

2.2. Target Population

The target population was 110,500 undergraduate students in the eight public and private universities with main campuses domiciled in Kiambu County.

2.3. Sample Size Determination

The study used the Yamane (1967) formula to determine the sample size. Using the equation from Yamane (1967), $n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$ where n is the sample size required for the study, N is the study's target population, and e is the precision level (5% in this case). Substituting the known population size and precision level implies that $n = \frac{110500}{1+110500(0.05^2)} = 398.5$, approximately 399 undergraduate students. This sample size was selected from three universities in Kiambu County, one public and two private universities. The two largest private universities in terms of student population were purposively selected. Since there is only one public university whose main campus is in Kiambu County, it was included in the study to avoid bias.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

Structured questionnaires for undergraduate students were employed to collect data.

2.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Through the use of Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS), Version 26.0, data collected through questionnaires was analysed through descriptive statistics comprising frequencies and percentages. The relationship between social media content and risky sexual behaviours will be assessed through a simple linear regression model:
$Risky\ Sexual\ behaviours = \beta_0 + \beta_1\ Social\ Media\ Content + \varepsilon$
Where: β_0 is the regression constant, β_1 is the regression coefficient and ε is the error term.

3. Results

3.1. Response Rate

During data collection, 399 questionnaires were distributed, and 363 were deemed adequately filled out for analysis. This represented a response rate of 91.0% for the questionnaires. Fincham (2008) considers a response rate exceeding 60.0% as appropriate for questionnaires, while Mangione (1995) considers a response rate exceeding 85.0% as excellent for questionnaires that are self-filled. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a 50.0% response rate is adequate, a 60-69.9% response rate is good, and a response rate of 70.0% and above is very good. Therefore, the response rate in this study is considered excellent for proceeding with analysis and findings generalisation.

3.2. Demographic Characteristics

The majority (63.6%) of the undergraduate students were aged between 18-25 years. Slightly more than half of the respondents, as shown by 54.5%, were male. In total, 70.6% of the undergraduate students had stayed in their respective

universities for a duration ranging between 2 to 4 years (see Table 1). The findings demonstrate that most of the respondents are very young adults and can easily be carried away by issues related to the youth, such as irresponsible sexual behaviours and drug/substance use and abuse. Further, the majority of the respondents have been in universities for more than one year and are, therefore, deemed to have knowledge of the experiences of university students.

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Age of the Respondents	Between 18-25 years	231	63.6%
	26-30 years	123	33.9%
	31-35 years	9	2.5%
Gender	Male	198	54.5%
	Female	165	45.5%
How long have you been on this campus?	1 year and below	64	17.6%
	2 years	83	22.9%
	3 years	95	26.2%
	4 years	78	21.5%
	>4 years	43	11.8%

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents
Source: Research Data (2023)

3.3. Frequency of Exposure to Social Media Content and Influence on Risky Sexual Behaviours

The study evaluated the influence of social media content on risky sexual behaviours of undergraduate students. Respondents were first required to indicate how regularly they were exposed to various social media content that may have an effect on them engaging in risky sexual behaviours. The findings are reported in table 2.

	Not Exposed At All	Rarely Exposed	Frequently Exposed	Very Frequently Exposed
Pornographic materials (videos and photos)	18 (5.0%)	84 (23.1%)	183 (50.4%)	78 (21.5%)
Posts on sexual orientations	24 (6.6%)	56 (15.4%)	160 (44.1%)	123 (33.9%)
Sexualised talks	0 (0.0%)	36 (9.9%)	165 (45.5%)	162 (44.6%)
Sexual experiences	192 (52.9%)	117 (32.2%)	24 (6.6%)	30 (8.3%)

Table 2: Frequency of Exposure to Social Media Content
Source: Research Data (2023)

Based on the results as reported in table 2, 50.4% (183) of the respondents indicated being frequently exposed to pornographic materials (videos and photos). In terms of exposure to posts on sexual orientations, a total of 78.0% (283) were frequently exposed. Further, 90.1% (327) of the respondents indicated being frequently exposed to sexualised talks. In terms of exposure to sexual experiences, 52.9% (192) indicated being never exposed at all.

Respondents were also asked to indicate on a Likert scale their agreement/disagreement level on some statements regarding how social media content influences risky sexual behaviours amongst university students. The results are reported in table 3.

Social Media…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
… Platform pornography exposed me to early involvement in sexual intercourse	40 (11.0%)	62 (17.1%)	59 (16.3%)	155 (42.7%)	47 (12.9%)
…pornography glorifies unprotected sex, thus increasing the urge to engage in risky sexual behaviours	16 (4.4%)	44 (12.1%)	68 (18.7%)	180 (49.6%)	55 (15.2%)
…networking platforms are full of sexual content such as flirting, photos to videos displaying risky sexual behaviours or behaviours that encourage me to indulge in irresponsible sexual behaviours	10 (2.8%)	24 (6.6%)	100 (27.5%)	159 (43.8%)	70 (19.3%)
…platforms provide an opportunity to create and post sexual content, thus displaying information about my sexual orientations and interests	39 (10.7%)	51 (14.0%)	72 (19.8%)	122 (33.6%)	79 (21.8%)
…platforms offer particular sexual behaviour information such as same sex relationships, thus promoting lesbianism and gayism	50 (13.8%)	66 (18.2%)	58 (16.0%)	109 (30.0%)	80 (22.0%)

Table 3: Likert Scale Responses on the Influence of Social Media Networking on Risky Sexual Behaviours
Source: Research Data (2023)

The findings depict that 55.6% (202) of the respondents are in agreement that social media platforms pornography exposed them to early involvement in sexual intercourse. In total, 64.8% (235) of the respondents were in agreement that social media pornography glorifies unprotected sex, thus increasing the urge to engage in risky sexual behaviours. Further, the results depict that 63.1% (229) of the respondents were in agreement that social media networking platforms are full of sexual content such as flirting, photos and videos displaying risky sexual behaviours or behaviours encouraging them to indulge in irresponsible sexual behaviours. From the results, a total of 55.4% (201) of the respondents were in agreement that social media platforms provide an opportunity to create and post sexual content, thus displaying information about their sexual orientations and interests. Lastly, 52.0% (189) of the respondents were in agreement that social media platforms offer particular sexual behaviour information, such as same-sex relationships, thus promoting lesbianism and gayism.

3.4. Risky Sexual Behaviours among University Students

Respondents were presented with seven true/false items measuring their level of engagement in risky sexual behaviours. A response that was true was given a score of 1; a false response was given a score of zero. Responses on the seven items are shown in table 4.

	False	True
I have engaged in sexual behaviour with more than one partner in the past one year	248 (68.3%)	115 (31.7%)
I have had intimate relationships with someone I just met online	322 (88.7%)	41 (11.3%)
I have hooked up but not had sex with someone I did not know well but met through social media platforms	255 (70.2%)	108 (29.8%)
I have gone out to social events such as bars, parties, etc., with people I have met online or with the intent of hooking up or engaging in sexual behaviour	259 (71.3%)	104 (28.7%)
I have had sexual intercourse without a condom	231 (63.6%)	132 (36.4%)
I have had sexual intercourse without any pregnancy protection	315 (86.8%)	48 (13.2%)
I have engaged in same sex relationships in the recent past	337 (92.8%)	26 (7.2%)

Table 4: Extent of Engagement in Different Risky Sexual Behaviours
Source: Research Data (2023)

According to the findings, 31.7% (115) of the respondents had engaged in sexual behaviour with more than one partner in the past one year; 11.3% (41) had intimate relationships with someone they just met online; 29.8% (108) had hooked-up but not had sex with someone they did not know well but met through social media platforms; 28.7% (had gone out to social events such as bars, parties etc. with people they had met online or with the intent of hooking up or engaging in sexual behaviour; 36.4% (132) had had sexual intercourse without a condom; 13.2% (48) had sexual intercourse without any pregnancy protection; and 7.2% (26) had engaged in same-sex relationships in the recent past.

The individual responses were summed to obtain the total scores for engagement in risky sexual behaviours. Based on the items scoring, the highest score expected was 7, which implied that students had very high levels of engagement in risky sexual behaviours. The lowest score expected was 0, implying that students did not engage in risky sexual behaviours. Any score of 1 and above, however, implied engagement in risky sexual behaviours to some extent. The overall score for risky sexual behaviours is shown in table 5.

Score	Frequency	Per cent
.00	79	21.8
1.00	82	22.6
2.00	130	35.8
3.00	60	16.5
4.00	8	2.2
5.00	4	1.1
Total	363	100.0

Table 5: Risky Sexual Behaviours Score
Source: Research Data (2023)

Based on the results in table 5, it is evident that 35.8% (13) had a score of two (meaning engagement in two risky sexual behaviours), 22.6% (82) had a total score of 1 (engagement in only one risky sexual behaviour, 16.5% (60) had a total score of 3 (engagement into 3 risky sexual behaviours), 2.2% (8) had a total score of 4 (engagement into 4 risky sexual behaviours) and 1.1% (4) had a total score of 5 (engagement into 5 risky sexual behaviours). From the findings, 21.8% (79) did not engage in any form of risky sexual behaviours. It can, therefore, be concluded that the majority of university students (78.2%) engage in at least one form of risky sexual behaviour.

3.5. Regression Modelling

A regression model was used to assess the nature of the relationship between risky sexual behaviours (independent variable) and social media content sexual experiences, as the independent variable. The model summary results, as shown in table 6, show that R-Square=0.605 (60.5%). This shows that 60.5% of risky sexual behaviours are explained by social media content experiences.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.778[a]	.605	.589	1.10202
a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Predatory Exposure, Social Media Content, Social Media Networking				

Table 6: Regression Model Summary
Source: Research Data (2023)

The ANOVA results in table 7 show that the p-value<0.0001. This shows that the regression model is significant and can be adopted in predicting risky sexual behaviours from social media content.

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	23.938	1	23.938	19.711	.000[b]
	Residual	438.415	361	1.214		
	Total	462.353	362			
a. Dependent Variable: Extent of risky behaviours						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Content						

Table 7: ANOVA Results
Source: Research Data (2023)

The regression coefficient results are shown in table 8.

	Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.042	.334		9.107	.000
	Social Media Content	.133	.030	.228	4.440	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Extent of risky behaviours						

Table 8: Regression Coefficients for Regression between Social
Media Experiences and Risky Sexual Behaviours
Source: Research Data (2023)

From the regression coefficients in table 8, the p-values for both the constant and the regression coefficient are all less than 0.0001. This means that the constant and the respective regression coefficient are significant. Therefore, social media content is a significant predictor of risky sexual behaviours among university students. The regression coefficient is positive. This means that an increase in exposure to illicit content through various social media experiences increases risky sexual behaviours. The regression model for predicting risky sexual behaviours from social media experiences is, therefore, written as:

Risky Sexual Behaviours = 3.042+ 0.133 Social Media Content

4. Discussion

The study found that social media content has a positive significant effect on risky sexual behaviours among university students. These findings support Negriff (2019), who noted that social media platforms are full of sexual content such as flirting, sexual intercourse, photos and videos depicting risky sexual behaviours that expose individuals to engage in irresponsible sexual behaviours. According to Quincy and Manduza (2021), social media platforms have a tendency to influence the sexual activities and acts of users by exposing them to materials that are sexually explicit in addition to offering users specific sexual behaviour information. A study conducted in the USA by Smith *et al.* (2016) revealed that when youth are exposed to websites containing sexually explicit content, they are more likely to indulge in unprotected sexual practices. Fibrilla *et al.* (2021) conducted a study in Indonesia and found that risky sexual behaviours increase with exposure to pornography through social media platforms. Further, a study by Wright and Rubin (2016) in the USA and Australia assessed sexual content and its influence on risky sexual behaviours and found high sexual risk and negative understanding of sexual behaviours across those exposed to illicit content on social media platforms.

The results of this study further agree with Nnebue *et al.* (2020), who conducted a study in Nigeria. Nnebue *et al.* (2020) found that the majority of university students utilise social media platforms to access sexually explicit content. In addition, a significant correlation was found between social media utilisation to access sexual content and sexual activeness, engaging in numerous sexual acts and having numerous sexual partners. Similar findings were found in Ethiopia by Wana *et al.* (2019), who found that pre-college students using social media to acquire pornographic content

had numerous sex partners and engaged in risky sexual behaviours such as unprotected sex and engaging in same-sex marriages.

A study in Kenya by Nyamu (2019) found that university learners in Tharaka Nthi County utilised most of their time on their phones watching porn, viewing revealing photos, reading and viewing sexual messages, in addition to listening to songs that were sexually suggestive. This was further found to be highly correlated with engaging in risky sexual behaviours among the learners. In another study in Nairobi, Kenya, Chege and Mwangi (2019) found that close to half of the university students participated in social media groups that posted content portraying sexuality and behaviours related to sex. This proportion of students was found to have a higher likelihood of engaging in sexual behaviours that were risky, such as sex parties.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that university students utilise social media platforms to access content that frequently exposes them to risky sexual behaviours. Utilising social media platforms to access illicit content influences university students' engagement in risky sexual behaviours.

6. Recommendations of the Study

The study found that social media experiences through social media content significantly affected risky sexual behaviours among university students. The study recommends that awareness campaigns on social media use and social media literacy programmes should be further enhanced. This will equip university students with critical skills in the responsible use of social media platforms. Students will also be equipped with skills to gauge different content on social media platforms and the way risky behaviours are advanced through social media platforms. Social media literacy programmes should also inform students of the likely dangers linked with consuming explicit sexual content.

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