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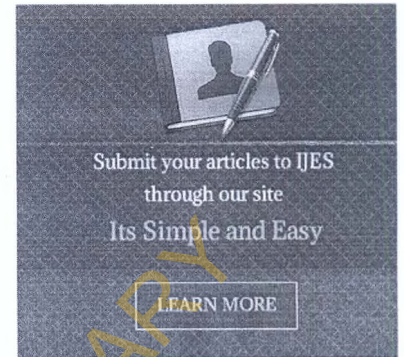
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## Social Influences as Correlates of Unsafe Internet Behaviour among In-School Adolescents in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*Social networks have become progressively more popular as a way for people to communicate and accessing the internet has also been made very easy through hand held and other devices. Unfortunately, many adolescents are left on the internet and granted unlimited access without monitoring which is necessary to ensure their online safety. A trend that could expose them to unhealthy and addictive behaviour with resultant effect on their academics, social and mental health. Regulating unsafe internet behaviour is an important issue for research. This study was designed with the aim of understanding social influences which correlates with unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North Local Government area of Oyo State, this is important to provide empirical data baseline to drive internet safety interventions. Descriptive research design was employed and a sample of 1154 was selected using a multi stage sampling technique. A self-developed and validated questionnaire titled *Unsafe Internet Behaviour and Social Correlates Questionnaire* with reliability index of 0.84 on the Cronbach alpha scale was used to generate data which were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 alpha level. The findings of the study showed that family influence ( $r=0.519$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ), peer influence ( $r=0.411$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ), school influence ( $r=0.557$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ), and media influence ( $r=0.606$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ) all significantly correlated with unsafe internet behaviour. Parental involvement and supervision should be a foundational component of internet safety education.*

**Key words:** Social influence, unsafe internet behaviour

## Introduction

Social networks have become an increasingly popular way for people to communicate over the last decade. Whether it is through a wall post, a picture, a video, or a link, users are able to share stories and details about their lives through social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and YouTube. The rapid growth of technology and the internet has made a significant transformation in the way in which individuals now communicate. Many people see this transformation as an advantage, for a variety of reasons. For example, messages are sent and received days faster than they were just 20 years ago. People thousands of miles away can now see each other on a daily basis via Skype, and other video chat programs. However, some people frown upon this communication innovation. They claim, for example, that it is unsafe and inappropriate. Others believe these methods of communication are appropriate only for older and more mature age groups due to security and privacy issues. (Miller Robert, Kristine Parsons & David Lifer, 2010)

In Nigeria, access and use of the internet has grown exponentially over the past decade. Indeed, more adolescents now have access to the internet more than ever before and their need for adventure has also increased the way and manner with which they use the internet. A research by Kunnuji, (2010) also suggested that adolescents account for a large proportion of internet users in Nigeria. In an earlier study Peter and Valkenburg, (2009) reported that more than 48% of Nigerian adolescents 12 to 17 years of age use the internet daily. Only some few decades ago, the internet was seen as a system of enormous technical and social complexity used more by adult for work and research but with the development of more social communication applications and sites these complexities became easier, friendly and attractive to adolescents who have adopted these forms of communication as the paramount way to keep in touch with parents and friends. Greenfield and Yan, (2006) stated that social media websites, such as Facebook, 2go, Whatsapp, BBM, Twitter and Instagram are the most popular places for adolescents to spend time and they pay a lot of attention to information and messages posted by their peers

Unsafe or risky behaviour have been related to the adolescent period due to their associated need for adventure and creativity. This stage has also been described as the most fascinating and complex transitions in the life span of man. Inyanf(2009) citing Adegoke(2003) stated that during this period, many individual get involved in risky behaviour often associated with life threatening consequences. Globally, adolescents tend to become early users and prime innovators on the internet, and are often far ahead of their parents and other adults in terms of use, skills and understanding (UNICEF, 2011). The internet, particularly social networking and other interactive media, provides new forms of social space globally that did not exist when most contemporary parents were themselves children and this is bringing about a growing concern on how this internet behaviour affects adolescents health (Camilia, Ibrahim & Dalhatu, 2013). The most frequent unsafe activities adolescents engage in on-line include addictive chatting, visiting pornographic sites, online dating, getting addictive to playing games and cyber bullying.

The veracity of the problem is that social networking sites are only as safe as a user makes them. Unfortunately, many of the free privacy settings available for users on the internet are not the default. To protect themselves, adolescents must be taught to censor what they post online and activate the appropriate privacy settings to secure their information. adolescents who share their personal information online must be made to understand that anything they post has the potential to be viewed by millions of people online, not just their friends.

Unfortunately, many adolescents are left unsupervised on the internet and are granted unlimited and unsupervised access without proper knowledge and training necessary to ensure their online safety. The ease of access of adolescent students to the social media networks has made them to form new sets of behaviour like hooliganism, truancy, drug abuse and illicit sexual behaviours. Exhibition of these bad

behaviours came as a result of peers and group they formed online. This social media has dramatically changed the attitude and behaviour of secondary school adolescents. There is an alarming rate of social networking obsession among adolescents today; a trend that could affect their academic, social and spiritual lives negatively if not properly controlled and thereby exposing those who access them to some dangers inherent in its usage and this is especially the case for adolescents. The Internet has provided a powerful and invasive weapon for cyber bullies and predators to prey on the vulnerable and the unsuspecting. How adolescents identify themselves with their peers and communicate can compromise their personal safety. Earlier studies have shown that peer pressure and addictive use of the internet pose serious health and safety problems for adolescents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Lenhart, 2009).

Parental role in preventing unsafe behaviour on line is a key factor to preventing adolescent internet unsafe behaviour. Farrukh, Sadwick, and Villasenor (2014) revealed that most parents report that it is relatively easy to “exercise guidance and supervision over their child’s use of various media,” although surveys of youth and parents report a significant disconnect between parental perception of youth online activity and actual youth experiences. 39 percent of teens surveyed responded that their parents monitor their online activities “very” or “somewhat” closely, though 84 percent of parents responded that they monitor their children’s activities “very” or “somewhat” closely. Similarly, 91 percent of parents said they are well informed about what their teens do online and on their mobile phones, while only 60 percent of teens surveyed say their parents are well informed. Part of the divide between parent and youth perception of their monitoring of online activities stem from the fact that some parents take measures to protect their children’s online safety of which their children are unaware.

It is no longer news that student-teacher relationships have now moved to social networking sites such as Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook and others. Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) draw attention to the fact that internet sites such as “Facebook and others provides opportunities for teachers and students to interact in new ways but concluded that the guidelines and expectations for behaviour have not been clearly identified” Clearly, social networking sites would be an excellent source for students and teachers to use to communicate with one another after school. However, people argue that students and teachers contacting one another via social networking is inappropriate. Some sites could be used as a place for students to discuss certain topics and assignments with the ability for teachers to provide their input. But some teachers may feel uncomfortable being “friends” with their students on these sites because it would give students access to their personal information. Some students on the other hand are also opposed to being friends with their teachers online for the same reasons.

Safety of adolescents is becoming a growing controversial issue online and with the advancements of technology, it is difficult to ignore the issues that come along with them. To better understand the social impact adults and older peers have in role modelling inappropriate online internet behaviours, it is important to identify social influences correlating with internet unsafe behaviour among adolescents in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State

## Objectives

Specifically, the study was designed to:

- 1) find-out the influence of family members on adolescent unsafe internet behaviour
- 2) examine the influence of school on adolescent unsafe internet behaviour
- 3) examine the influence of peer group on adolescent unsafe internet behaviour
- 4) find-out the influence of media on adolescent unsafe internet behaviour

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested

1. Family influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.
2. School influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.
3. Peer influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.
4. Media influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.

## Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted because of its suitability in realizing the study objectives. The population was made up of 11,681 male and female adolescent students in public Secondary Schools in Ibadan North Local Government area of Oyo state. A sample size of one thousand, hundred and fifty-four (1154) respondents was drawn using a multi stage sampling technique. In stage one, simple random sampling technique of fishbowl with replacement was used to select 18 (50%) schools out of the 36 existing schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo state. In stage two, purposive sampling technique was used to select students who fall within the adolescent age bracket of 10-16years and in the final stage, proportionate sampling technique was used to select 20% of students from each school selected for the study and this provided a sample of 1154 secondary school students.

The main instrument used for data collection was a 47-item questionnaire titled Unsafe Internet Behaviour and Social Correlates Questionnaire. The instrument was field-tested among thirty (30) secondary school students from Ido local government area of Oyo State who are not part of the study. The generated data were subjected to Cronbach alpha reliability test which yielded a coefficient of 0.84. Six research assistants worked with the researcher to administer the instruments. The data collected were entered into SPSS and analysed using inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 alpha level.

## Results

**Hypothesis one:** Family influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.

*Table 1: Correlation between Family Influence and Unsafe Internet Behaviour*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	r	p
Family Influence	13.6197	2.203	1154	.519	0.000
Unsafe Internet Behaviour	34.8310	3.8401			

The table above showed the Pearson Product Moment Correlation result which revealed that there was a significant correlation between family influence and unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescent in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State ( $r=0.519$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ).

The result thus showed that family influence has significant correlation with unsafe internet behaviour. The null hypothesis is thus rejected. This finding has significant implication for effective monitoring and communication between parents and their adolescents children.

**Hypothesis two:** School influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.

**Table 2: Correlation between School Influence and Unsafe Internet Behaviour**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	r	p
School Influence	18.9219	8.3184	1154	.411	0.01
Unsafe Internet Behaviour	80.7000	3.8423			

The findings of the study as shown in the table above revealed that there is positive and moderate correlation between school influence and unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescent in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State ( $r=0.411$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. The finding implies that the social environment in school such as the student-teacher relationship and other school interactions online will predispose adolescents to unsafe internet behaviour.

**Hypothesis three:** Peer influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.

**Table 3: Correlation between Peer Influence and Unsafe Internet Behaviour**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	r	p
Peer Influence	4.218	9.8801	1154	.557	0.000
Unsafe Internet Behaviour	17.0826	4.8609			

The findings of the study as shown in the table above revealed that there is positive and moderate correlation between peer influence and unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescent in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State ( $r=0.557$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld. This implies that adolescent peer relationship plays a significant role in unsafe internet Behaviour.

**Hypothesis Four:** Media influence will not be a significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North L.G.A.

**Table 4: Correlation between Media Influence and Unsafe Internet Behaviour**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	R	p
Media Influence	6.3217	8.8621	1154	.606	0.000
Unsafe Internet Behaviour	15.4319	3.9147			

The findings of the study as shown in the table above revealed that there is positive and moderate correlation between media influence and unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescent in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State ( $r=0.606$ ,  $df=1153$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld. This equally has implication for parenting and adolescent safety as this role is central to reducing the influence of the media on the socialization process of the adolescent.

### Discussion of Findings

The result of the study showed that family influence is a significant correlate of unsafe internet behaviour. Every child is from a home and the behaviour of every individual, especially children and adolescents are largely shaped by the influences of the home. Beginning from the parenting styles down to the interactions that exist between siblings and significant others in the home, health supportive or health destructive behaviour can be developed in the child. Families where children are free to operate with little or no supervision, they are more likely to engage in fatalistic behaviours. Adolescents who have no business using smartphones acquire smartphones or they are given by their parent or a close family member. They also spend a significant amount of their time on the internet. It is therefore important that parents and significant others in the family play good supervisory roles over the internet behaviour of adolescents. Watching adolescents spend a significant proportion of their time on the internet without taking any drastic action to call them to order at home will increase the likelihood of internet addiction.

It is also necessary for parents to initiate and sustain communication with their children on the dangers on the internet and encourage them to make safe choices. Unfortunately, many parents fail to emphasize these important safeguards when allowing their children to go online. This finding is in line with the finding of (Taylor, 2001) who reported that many children are left unsupervised on the information superhighway and are granted access to the internet without the proper knowledge and training necessary to ensure their online safety. The finding is also in line with the finding of (Adiomoses, 2015) who reported that the need for economic buoyancy has resulted in near breakdown of the family system as children are now leading lives without proper parenting which is crucial to safe internet behaviour.

The findings of the study also showed that the school significantly influenced unsafe internet behaviour among adolescents. The school is a notable socialization agent of every society. It is an institution consciously created to socialize children and into the ethos of the society. The school could therefore play a significant role in controlling unsafe behaviour on the internet. Cases of students operating their phones right in the classroom are common and the school disciplinary system is so slack to checkmate this anomaly. Educating adolescents on safety issues concerning the use of smartphones in school could help control unsafe internet behaviour based on the ecological model of health. Unsafe internet behaviour is becoming a major challenge especially among adolescents and the school must stand up to its responsibility to protect the school community and the society at large. There has been the argument that the internet provides for good educational support and its use should be encouraged in the school. While this is incontrovertible, it is pertinent to state that development of mobile libraries where internet use can be monitored is far preferable to providing internet enabled gadgets to individual students in secondary school with little or no control on what use they are put to. This calls for wrong internet use which thus calls for stringent control measures to reduce unsafe internet behaviour among young people in secondary schools. This finding corroborates the findings of Murry(2014) which

reported unsafe internet use among students in school facilitated by poor monitoring and supervision by concerned persons in the school.

The findings of the study also showed that peer influence plays significant role in unsafe internet behaviour among respondents. One of the enduring attributes of adolescents is group identity and loyalty. It is therefore impossible for adolescents to desist from what their peers are involved in. Adolescents are more likely to believe and adopt what their peers tell them than what their parents tell them. This is especially the case when there is poor interpersonal relationship between such parent and the adolescent. Social media is considered as the most common use to which young people put the internet to and these social media can only be used in connecting others. The overwhelming importance of good parenting also comes into the picture as parents are expected to monitor the kind of friends that their children and wards keep. On-line dating, pornography sites visit, internet based fraud and other unsafe internet behaviour are likely to be reinforced by the nature of friends one keep. It is therefore important to ensure that internet visits and interaction with friends are monitored and censored by parents and caregivers. This finding is in line with the findings of Bada and Ayodele, (2013) which also reported that internet use behaviour of young people is closely tied to the online activities of the social networks and groups they belong.

The study finding also showed that the media play significant role in unsafe internet behaviour. The media is nearly taking the centre stage in the socialization of the child as most of what children learn nowadays can be largely attributable to the influence of the media. Internet use therefore can be largely determined by interaction with the media. The mass media, print, visual, audio and audio-visual play overwhelming role in socialization of young people in this century. It is important to state that young people spend greater period interacting with media than they interact with people around them. Although the media does not totally have wrong impact on the child, it is however important that its usage and the exposure of the child to its contents are largely censored and monitored. This is in line with the findings of Okafor and Malizu(2013) which reported the overwhelming role that the media plays on the socialization of the child with need to monitor the contents of these media to reduce or totally avoid exposure to harmful contents.

## **Conclusion**

Confidence in the safety and benefits of online experiences among in-school adolescent is important for adolescents safety and wellbeing. By implication, the findings of this study revealed that adolescents are often influenced by their family when deciding how to use the internet. It is therefore concluded that adolescents identify themselves with the social influences that were studied and if this identification is negative it can compromise their personal safety behaviour and expose them to online dangers. Social influences from family, school, peer pressure, and mass media are all significant correlates of unsafe internet behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ibadan North Local Government area of Oyo State Nigeria. In addressing these influences as a means to mitigating unsafe internet behaviour, the following were recommended.



## Recommendations

1. Safety educational strategies that will promote internet safety among adolescents should be promoted and encouraged as this will provide information on privacy and other security issues to both parents and their adolescent children.
2. Health educational strategies to teach responsible, healthy and safe internet use coupled with technology, policy, and privacy law should be encouraged.
3. Monitoring of outlined environment and potential risk factors that influence adolescent online choices should be encouraged.
4. Schools must use the Internet with realistic expectations about its role in teaching and learning, understanding its strengths and weaknesses.
5. Teachers should also have immediate control of technology in the classroom so they can override technology protections that inadvertently get in the way of instruction.
6. The student-teacher relationship on social media should be on a professional basis and not personal.
7. There should be structured opportunity for adults and adolescents to engage in dialogue about internet safety.
8. Parents should converse with their children about online safety to have new insights into adolescent's online activities.
9. Laws and regulation can help to the cyber environment by reducing at least to some extent the availability of inappropriate sexually explicit material on the Internet.
10. Schools should encourage positive internet usage and monitoring online and this should be entrenched in every aspect of the Nigerian educational system.
11. The Mass media should provide education to young people about internet safety precautions by producing programmes tailored towards positive internet safety behaviour
12. More work is needed to understand how these social variables impacts online safety, and a better understanding of the specific role that mobile devices may also play in promoting online safety is needed.

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