

Beyond the screen: Uncovering the roots of delinquency among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Delinquency among school-aged adolescents is a widespread issue in both developed and developing countries, with serious social, academic, and emotional effects on the individuals involved and the wider community. Studies have identified some factors as causes of delinquency. But there is limited research on the psychosocial factors that are associated with delinquency in Nigeria. This study examined the contributions of peer pressure and social media use to delinquency among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state, south western Nigeria. The study involved a sample size of 300 respondents selected through multi-stage sampling technique. Questionnaires were administered to the participants to gather relevant quantitative data. Analysis was conducted using multiple regression analysis. Findings showed that students who experienced higher levels of peer pressure reported higher levels of delinquency. On the other hand, social media use did not have a significant influence in delinquency among secondary school students. The findings suggest that peer pressure remains a more potent predictor of delinquent behavior than general social media use among secondary school students. This underscores the importance of targeting peer dynamics and strengthening adolescents' resistance to peer pressure in delinquency prevention efforts. Interventions focused solely on limiting social media use may be less effective unless they address the social contexts and relationships that shape youth behavior both online and

Introduction

Adolescence, marked by critical physical, emotional, and psychological development, play a pivotal role in shaping behaviour and identity (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). During this time, young people are particularly susceptible to engaging in problematic behaviour and delinquency. Delinquency is described as the behaviour that is societally unacceptable; it is negative actions that are committed by teenagers specifically under the age of 18 years (Gupta et al. 2022). These behaviours can range from skipping school and minor theft to more severe actions such as violent crimes or substance abuse. Adolescent delinquency is a significant global issue, drawing increasing attention due to its causes and widespread effects on individuals, families, communities, and society (Fikiri & Michael, 2023). In adolescence, delinquency is often viewed as a form of deviance shaped by a combination of individual vulnerabilities and broader social and cultural influences. During this time, peer influence and the use of social media are increasingly identified as key factors that shape adolescent behaviour, including their engagement in delinquent actions such as substance use,

truancy, theft, and violence (Steinberg, 2005).

The advent of digital technologies, especially social media and the internet, has profoundly transformed how young people engage with the world (Haddock et al., 2022). Studies have found that while social media offers adolescents opportunities for social interaction, self-expression, and validation, it also exposes them to harmful content and peer influences that may encourage risky behaviours (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). According to Goldsmith and Wall (2019), excessive use of social media is associated with a growing trend of delinquency; and social media fosters harmful interactions among youth (Bunders & Weerman, 2020). In Nigeria, there is an increasing body of research indicating that social media use among adolescents is rising, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter serving as spaces for both positive and negative peer interactions (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2020). The cultivation theory by George Gerbner (1976) posits that long-term exposure to media content can shape an individual's perceptions of reality. Adolescents who spend significant time on social media may come to view the reports of antisocial behaviours they see online as

normal or acceptable, which could contribute to the development of delinquent behaviours. The theory is particularly useful for understanding how prolonged exposure to certain online content (e.g., violent or deviant behaviour) could distort adolescents' perceptions and attitudes, thus encouraging delinquency.

Research suggests that activities like playing violent video games, engaging in online gambling, or participating in unsupervised social media interactions may contribute to higher levels of aggression, diminished academic performance, and an increased tendency toward risky behaviours (Greitemeyer 2019; Anderson et al., 2010). Babilonová et al. (2024) reported that adolescents involved in online communities that promote risky behaviours, such as drug use or promiscuity, are more likely to replicate these actions in real life, thereby increasing their chances of engaging in delinquent behaviour. Young people's desire for approval on social media can influence them to take part in behaviours they would usually avoid, especially when these behaviours are made to seem normal or attractive by their friends. Previous research in Nigerian have reported that social media is associated with antisocial behaviours such as substance use in Delta state (Odojin&Igabari, 2023) while Ugboke et al. (2025) found that social media addiction predicted adolescents' involvement in delinquent activities. Facebook addiction was associated with aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Uyo (Jimmy & Okon, 2017). Olayemi (2022) also found that social media negatively influences youth by exposing them to delinquent behaviours, particularly when they spend excessive time online. Some other studies have also linked social media use to various forms of delinquent behaviour, including cyberbullying, sexting, and substance abuse (Mesch, 2009; Dehghan et al., 2020). Reports from Ibadan and other Nigerian cities suggest a rising trend in adolescent delinquency (Folarin & Adeyemo, 2021), but while research on adolescent delinquency in Nigeria is expanding, there remains a gap in studies that specifically explore the relationship between exposure to social media, and delinquency, particularly among in-school adolescents.

Peer pressure is another factor that influences delinquent behaviour among adolescents, and it has long been identified as a key factor shaping adolescent behaviour (Laursen&Veenstra, 2021). The need to fit with peers is especially strong during the teenage years when individuals are particularly vulnerable to the sway of their peer groups. The role of peer influence in delinquency could be explained within some key theoretical frameworks. Social learning theory by Albert Bandura 1977 posits that behaviour is learned through interactions with others, particularly within one's social environment. Adolescents learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In the context of delinquency, this theory suggests that adolescents may engage in deviant behaviours because they observe their peers or family members doing so, and these behaviours are either rewarded or normalized. Peer pressure, as a social factor, is particularly relevant here, as it often leads adolescents to engage in risky or delinquent behaviours in order to fit

in or gain approval from their peer groups. Peer pressure, often exerted by peer groups, can push adolescents into behaviours they would not normally engage in, particularly when they seek social approval or fear exclusion (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005).

Dishion and Tipsord (2011) found that adolescents associated with delinquent peer groups are more prone to substance abuse, violence, and other unlawful behaviours. Several studies in Nigeria have reported that peer influence plays a critical role in encouraging delinquent behaviour among adolescents (Ebenezer et al., 2021; Ekenuwa-Okoh & Ugoji, 2015; Olowo, 2020; Sodiq et al., 2021). However, while research has investigated the effects of social media and peer pressure on adolescent delinquency in various international contexts, there is limited knowledge that have simultaneously examined their impact on delinquency among in-school adolescents in Ibadan (Adebayo, 2017; Ogunyemi, 2018). Much of the existing research focuses on Western contexts, where the socio-cultural environment differs significantly from that in Nigeria (Olatunji, 2020). This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the role of social media use and peer pressure in influencing delinquency among in-school adolescents in Ibadan. It is hypothesized as follows: (1) Social media use will positively predict delinquency among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria. (2) Peer pressure will positively predict delinquency among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Four hundred in-school adolescents aged ≥ 10 years (mean age = 14.29, $SD = 1.79$) were selected through multistage sampling technique from five government owned secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government, Nigeria. There was a nearly equal gender distribution (52.0% male, 48.0% female). By ethnicity, there were: Yorubas ($n = 260$, 86.7%), Igbos ($n = 25$, 8.3%), Hausas ($n = 6$, 2.0%), and others ($n = 9$, 3.0%). Their religious affiliations were Christianity ($n = 158$, 52.7%), Islam ($n = 128$, 42.7%) and others ($n = 14$, 4.6%). They were drawn from the following schools: Ebenezer African Church Grammar school ($n = 117$, 39.0%), Abadina Grammar School ($n = 56$, 18.7%), Bashorun Ojoo High School ($n = 55$, 18.3%), Ikolaba Grammar School ($n = 37$, 12.3%) and Oba Akinyele Memorial High School ($n = 35$, 11.7%). Ethical clearance was obtained from the Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Ibadan with approval number UI/SSHREC2024/0125. A child assent form was given to the participants, which informed them of their principals' permission for the study, and they signed the assent form before participating in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were highly protected during the study.

Instruments

Self-Report Delinquency Scale

The Self-Report Delinquency Scale was developed by Pechorro et al. (2018). It has 17 items scored on a 4-point Likert

format ranging from 0 = none, to 3 = five or more times. High scores on the scale reflected increased delinquency and low scores reflected reduced delinquency among secondary school students. Some of the sample items of the scale include: *In the last 12 months I painted graffiti or signs on someone else's property or in a public place; In the last 12 months I took something from the store without paying for it; In the last 12 months, I drove a car without its owner's permission; In the last 12 months, I stole something worth more than 50 pounds.* The reliability of the scale as reported by Udry (2003) was Cronbach's α of .89. The Cronbach's α reliability of the scale in the current study was .87.

Peer Pressure Scale (PPS)

The PPS was developed by Brown et al. (1986). It contains 11 items scored on a 5-point Likert format ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Some of the items on the scale include: *My friends could push me into doing just about anything; I give into peer pressure easily; When at school, if a group of people asked me to do something, it would be hard to say no.* Higher scores on the questionnaire indicate increased exposure to peer pressure while low responses indicate reduced peer pressure. The Cronbach's α reliability of the PPS as reported by Brown et al. (1986) ranged from .69 to .91. Previous research in Nigeria has found the PPS to be

reliable and valid (Eze et al., (2020). In the current study, the Cronbach's α was .84 indicating that the scale was reliable.

Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)

The SMUS is a 17 item that was developed by Tuck and Thompson (2021). It indicated social media activities in the PAST WEEK (7 days), scored on a 9-point response format expressing the frequency of use where 1- never, while 9 indicate hourly. Some of the items on the scale include: *Made/shared a post or story about something positive that was personally about me; Looked at how many people liked, commented on, shared my content, or followed/friended me; Read comments to my own content; Edited and/or deleted my own social media content.* The Cronbach's α reliability coefficients reported by the authors was between .77 to .83. The reliability coefficient reported in the current study was .91. It has been used in a previous study in Nigeria (Ojobu et al. 2024). A high internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) of .91 was obtained in the present study.

Design/Statistics

This study utilized expostfacto cross-sectional survey design. Data was analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 to test the contributions of the predictor variables in delinquent behaviours.

Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	156	52.0%	14.29	1.79
	Female	144	48.0%		
	10 to 18 years	290	96.7%		
	above 18 years	10	3.3%		
Class level	SSS1	118	39.3%		
	SSS2	124	41.3%		
	SSS3	20	6.7%		
	JSS3	38	12.7%		
Ethnicity	Yoruba	260	86.7%		
	Igbo	25	8.3%		
	Hausa	6	2.0%		
	Others	9	3.0%		
Religion	Christianity	158	52.7%		
	Muslim	128	42.7%		
	Others	14	4.7%		
School	Abadina	56	18.7%		
	Bashorun Ojoo	55	18.3%		
	Ebenezer high school	117	39.0%		
	Ikolaba	37	12.3%		
	Oba Akinyele	35	11.7%		

The age distribution confirms that most respondents were teenagers.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of key study variables

Variables		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Delinquency	0.87	0	51	19.21	5.08
Peer Pressure	0.84	11	50	18.95	7.10
Social Media use	0.91	17	85	39.86	15.93

The mean delinquency score was 19.21 ($SD = 5.08$), while social media use has the highest average score of 39.86 ($SD = 15.93$),

suggesting frequent engagement and they had an average score of 18.95 ($SD = 7.10$) on peer pressure

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Delinquency	19.21	5.08	--				
Peer pressure	18.95	7.10	.128*	--			
Social media use	39.86	15.93	-.048	.403**	--		
Gender	1.48	.50	-.013	.062	-.003	--	
Age	2.03	.19	-.007	.043	-.020	-.082	--
Class level	1.93	.98	.041	-.051	-.043	.045	-.042

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

A positive correlation was found between peer pressure and delinquency ($r = .13$, $p < .05$), suggesting that students who experience higher levels of peer influence are more likely to engage in delinquent activities. Additionally, a moderate correlation between peer pressure and social media use ($r = .40$, $p < .01$) indicating that students who feel pressured by their peers are also

more likely to spend time on social media. No significant correlation was found between social media use and delinquency ($r = -.05$, $p > .05$). Other demographic variables such as gender, age, and class level did not show significant associations with delinquency, implying that these factors alone do not strongly predict deviant behavior.

Table 4: hierarchical regression showing the incremental influence of social media and peer pressure in delinquency behaviour

Variables		<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	df	<i>F</i>	ΔF	Sig.
1				.04 ^a	.00	.00	3, 294	5.53	.186	.906 ^b
	Gender	-.02	.26	.80						
	Age	-.01	.11	.92						
	Class level	.04	.70	.48						
				.06	.00	.00	1, 293	3.15	.63	.88
2	Social media use	-.05	.82	.41						
	Gender	-.01 ^b	.23	.82						
	Age	-.01 ^b	.13	.90						
	Class level	.02 ^b	.66	.51						
3				.17	.03	.03	2, 292	4.20	7.70	.00
	Social media use	-.12	1.88	.06						
	Peer pressure	.17	2.78	.01						
	Gender	-.02 ^c	.41	.68						
	Age	-.02 ^c	.29	.77						
	Class level	.05 ^c	.79	.43						

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to examine the contributions of social media use and peer pressure on the outcome variable with gender, age, and class level as control variables. The first regression model contained the demographic variables. The overall outcome variance level remained very minimal ($R^2 = 0.00$) and failed to reach statistical significance. The analysis confirmed

that none of the demographic information was significant in the prediction of delinquency.

The second model incorporated social media as a new predictor variable while retaining all the demographic variables. The second model's ability to explain the total variation in delinquency ($R^2 = 0.00$) and the worth of change in explained

variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.00$) remained non-significant. The last model included peer pressure to the regression with social media usage and the demographic factors. Findings indicated substantial improvements to the explanatory power of the variables as the total variance explained rose to 3% ($R^2 = 0.03$). Statistics show the change in explained variance reached significance at $p = 0.003$ with a value of $\Delta R^2 = .03$ indicating peer pressure significantly accounted for some unique variance in delinquency. Higher levels of peer pressure link directly to rises in delinquency ($\beta = .17, p = 0.006$). The negative coefficient of social media use ($\beta = -0.118$) was marginally non-significant ($p = 0.061$) suggesting that its inverse relation with the outcome variable may exist but has not met statistical significance. The analysis findings demonstrate that peer pressure stands as a fundamental factor which influences delinquency among the studied variables.

Discussion

The present study examined the influence of social media use and peer pressure on delinquency among adolescents in Ibadan. It was found that social media use did not significantly predict delinquency. The first hypothesis stated that social media use would be positively predict delinquency among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria. Other scholars (e.g., Meldrum & Clarke, 2015) posited that it is not clear how social media influences delinquent behaviour among secondary school students. This lack of clarity may be because it is not all the students have access to social media. One past research had shown that that past drinking experiences of these secondary school students did not depend on social media use (Huang et al., 2014). Abbott and Gainous (2023) proposed that social media use may not contribute maximally to delinquency because of the unpredictable nature of its effect among different kinds of students. It is possible that the adolescents in the present study may use social media in ways that are socially supportive, supervised, or educational. The limited access to mobile phone or controlled accept and other protective factors (e.g., strong family ties, school engagement, or digital literacy) could have buffered potential risks and reduced the likelihood of delinquent behaviour despite high usage.

The results showed that peer pressure had a significant positive relationship with delinquency. Students with higher peer pressure reported higher levels of delinquency. Examining the influence of social media use and peer pressure on delinquency among adolescents in Ibadan. The second hypothesis stated that peer pressure would be positively predict delinquency among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria was supported. This finding is in line with Yeng and Mohamad, (2023) who reported that peer pressure had a strong effect on delinquency among students. The influence of peer pressure is mostly negative as students who come from decent families end up joining the bandwagon to engage in antisocial behaviours. The constant manifestation of peer pressure would always create in the students a sense of negativity as they tend to belong to associations without a proper understanding of the inherent dangers linked with peer pressure. An important factor in

delinquency was shown to be heightened peer pressure. It is therefore required that more caution be considered when students engage in different associations as some of their associations could be tending towards negativity in the absence of control.

The major limitation is that the study utilized one local government area in Ibadan and participants were drawn from only government owned secondary schools. This affects the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should explore more than one local government area and do comparative study between government owned schools and private schools. The current findings indicate that not all social media use is equal. Passive browsing, chatting with friends, watching videos, and participating in groups differ in purpose and impact. Perhaps, the use of a general measure of "social media use" may have obscured the effects of specific types of online behaviour (e.g., exposure to deviant peers, cyberbullying, or risky challenges). There is need for a more contextualized measure of social media use in future studies. Such investigations should also measure the protective factors that could moderate the relationship.

Another important direction for future studies is that social media use may only lead to delinquency indirectly, through mediators (e.g., association with deviant peers, exposure to violent or antisocial content, poor parental monitoring), and these factors need to be included in longitudinal research on these factors in relation to delinquency. The cross-sectional design adopted in this study could not have captured long-term effects or causal pathways. Specifically, if the delinquency measure focused on recent or severe behaviours, and social media use was assessed generally, the two may not align in time frame or relevance. Longitudinal studies are needed in order to clearly understand the nature of the associations investigated in the present study.

Conclusion

From this study, peer pressure had a significant influence on delinquency. Higher levels of peer pressure were linked to increased levels of delinquency among secondary school students while low levels of peer pressure were associated with reduced levels of delinquency. Contrary to popular concerns, social media use did not significantly predict delinquent behavior in our sample. This suggests that the mere amount of time spent online may not be a sufficient risk factor, and that individual, contextual, or platform-specific factors likely shape the influence of social media on youth outcomes. Social media platforms offer spaces for interaction, and may not always serve as major drivers of delinquency. The absence of a significant contribution of social media use to delinquency in Ibadan may reflect the unique socio-cultural environment of the region, where offline influences may take precedence over online behaviours.

This study highlights the importance of contextualizing research on adolescent delinquency within local realities, as factors influencing behaviour may vary significantly across different cultural and geographical settings. There is a need for further

research to explore the relationship between social media, offline interactions, and other socio-cultural variables in Nigeria. Future studies should adopt a more holistic approach, considering not only the frequency and nature of social media use but also the broader socio-economic and environmental conditions of the adolescents.

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