

**SEXUAL CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS EFFECT ON THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF  
BENIN**

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BENIN CITY**

**OCTOBER, 2025**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL  
WORK, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN  
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WORK**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

We, the undersigned, hereby certify that this research project titled Sexual Content on Social Media and Its Effect on Psychological and Social Life of Students in University of Benin, by OSAZEME ISABEL EHIMWENMA with matriculation number SSC2106031, has been read and duly supervised in the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Degree in Social Work, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.

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**PROF. SUNDAY OFILI IBOBOR**  
**(Project Supervisor)**

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**DATE**

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**DR. (Mrs). HELEN E. EWEKA**  
**(Head of Department)**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to God Almighty, whose endless blessings, guidance, Wisdom and strength have made this journey possible. Without His grace none of this would have been achievable.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of sexual content on social media on the psychological and social life of students at the University of Benin. The research adopted a descriptive survey design and utilized a structured questionnaire administered to 100 undergraduate respondents across various faculties. The study sought to determine the extent of students' exposure to sexual content, the common types encountered, and how such exposure influences their behavior, mental health, and academic performance. Findings revealed that students are highly exposed to sexual content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. The most prevalent forms of content include nude images, sexually suggestive videos, and romantic skits. Exposure to such materials was found to significantly influence students' attitudes, leading to increased curiosity, anxiety, self-comparison, and changes in social behavior. Moreover, frequent exposure was negatively associated with academic performance due to distraction and reduced study concentration. The study further established that social workers play a vital role in mitigating these effects through counseling, digital literacy programs, and awareness campaigns on responsible media use. It concludes that while social media serves as an important communication and educational tool, unregulated access to sexual content poses serious psychological and academic risks to students. The study recommends that the University should strengthen digital literacy education, enhance counseling services, and engage social workers in promoting safe and healthy media consumption among students.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

In the last decade, social media has become a dominant medium through which young people interact, form opinions, and shape their behavior. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and Facebook have revolutionized how information is shared and consumed, especially among student (Kunnuji, 2019). In Nigeria, the proliferation of affordable smartphones and internet access has made it possible for students, particularly students in tertiary institutions, to be constantly connected to these platforms. While social media can be used for educational and social purposes, it also provides unrestricted access to sexually explicit content. The increasing exposure to sexual content on social media among students raises critical concerns about its effects on their psychological well-being, social behavior, and academic performance (Nwabueze & Oduaran, 2019).

Sexual content on social media may be intentional or incidental and includes sexually suggestive images, videos, conversations, advertisements, and influencer-driven trends. Especially University freshmen and underaged students, are at a critical developmental stage marked by identity formation, curiosity, and

vulnerability to peer influence. The University of Benin, as one of Nigeria's foremost higher institutions, hosts a significant number of students aged between 15 and 19 who are highly active on social media. These students are frequently exposed to sexualized content that may influence their understanding of sexuality and shape their interpersonal relationships, self-image, and academic engagement (Adebayo & Folarin, 2020).

While some scholars argue that exposure to sexual content can promote sexual awareness and education, others warn that unregulated consumption of such content often results in distorted sexual perceptions, risky behavior, and emotional distress (Okoye, 2018). In the Nigerian context, where cultural taboos limit open conversations about sexuality, many students resort to social media to explore these issues, sometimes resulting in misguided attitudes and actions. The influence of such content is compounded by the algorithm-driven nature of these platforms, which tend to recommend similar material, leading to excessive exposure. This reality necessitates a deeper examination of how sexual content on social media affects students' lives in academic environments such as the University of Benin (Nnebue, 2020).

The emergence and rapid evolution of social media platforms over the past two decades have transformed the global communication landscape, redefining how people interact, access information, and present themselves publicly and privately. With the rise of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter (now X), and others, social interaction has transcended physical boundaries, enabling real-time engagement, self-expression, and community building. For adolescents and students, these platforms serve as essential avenues for entertainment, peer interaction, identity formation, and emotional exploration. In Nigeria, the ubiquity of mobile technology, coupled with increasingly affordable data services, has made social media an integral part of youth culture, particularly among University students (Adebayo & Ola, 2021).

Among the myriad of content shared on these platforms, sexual content has emerged as one of the most prominent and controversial categories. Sexual content on social media encompasses a wide range of material, including explicit images and videos, suggestive memes, sexually oriented jokes, provocative dances, nudity, and discussions surrounding sexual behavior and experiences (Onasoga, 2019). Often unfiltered and widely disseminated, this content is accessible to users regardless of age, despite platform guidelines aimed at restricting access to explicit material. Due to their developmental stage and natural curiosity about sex and

relationships, are particularly susceptible to the allure of such content. According to Ajayi & Ayodele, (2019), adolescence is a critical period characterized by identity exploration, sexual awakening, and heightened sensitivity to social cues, making students particularly vulnerable to the influence of media messages related to sex and sexuality.

In the context of the University of Benin, one of Nigeria's premier higher education institutions, the influx of young students many of whom are still students into an environment of relative freedom presents unique challenges and opportunities. Away from the direct supervision of parents or guardians, students often rely on peers, the internet, and social media for guidance and information on matters related to relationships and sexuality. This makes them especially prone to frequent and unsupervised exposure to sexual content online. Studies have shown that Nigerian youths, especially University students, are some of the most active users of social media in Africa (Okon & James, 2019). This constant connectivity has resulted in both positive and negative outcomes. While some students harness social media for academic collaboration, entrepreneurship, and political activism, others fall into the trap of addiction, misinformation, and harmful behaviors, including those influenced by sexual content (Arulogun, 2017).

The consumption of sexual content on social media has both immediate and long-term consequences. Psychologically, constant exposure to hypersexualized material may lead to distorted perceptions of sex, gender roles, and relationships. Nwafor and Ugwu (2021) highlights that adolescents who consume sexually explicit content tend to develop unrealistic expectations about sexual encounters and may adopt attitudes that support casual sexual behavior and objectification of others. In a school environment like the University of Benin, where peer pressure and the desire for social validation are pronounced, this can manifest in behaviors such as sexting, sexual experimentation, and engagement in risky sexual activities without adequate knowledge or protection. In some cases, students attempt to mimic what they see online by dressing provocatively, engaging in romantic relationships they are emotionally unprepared for, or participating in sexually themed challenges popularized by social media influencers (Oriji, 2022).

Moreover, the frequent consumption of sexual content has been linked to various mental health challenges among students. Feelings of inadequacy, body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and depression have been reported among youth who compare themselves to the often edited or curated images and lifestyles portrayed online (Adebayo & Folarin, 2020). For students in the University of Benin, these psychological effects can be compounded by academic pressures, social

adjustment, and the struggle to find one's identity in a highly competitive and socially dynamic environment. The combination of these factors can significantly disrupt academic performance and overall well-being. Students may find themselves distracted from academic tasks, suffer from sleep deprivation due to late-night scrolling, or become emotionally distressed due to cyberbullying or rejection from online interactions (Abdullahi and Abdulquadri, 2018).

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the multifaceted influence of sexual content on social media on students at the University of Benin. By examining the level of exposure, types of content encountered, and perceived effects on behavior and academics, the research aims to fill a critical knowledge gap in the literature. The goal is not to demonize social media or sexuality but to understand the dynamics at play so that stakeholders educators, parents, policymakers, and the students themselves can develop informed strategies to promote digital literacy, responsible media consumption, and healthy adolescent development. Furthermore, this study aligns with the global discourse on safe internet usage, adolescent mental health, and media responsibility, offering a localized perspective from a Nigerian University context (Ibrahim, 2020).

Social work and social media are increasingly intertwined in contemporary practice, reflecting the growing relevance of digital communication platforms in promoting social justice, community engagement, and service delivery. Social media has become a powerful tool for social workers to disseminate information, advocate for vulnerable populations, engage with communities, and facilitate communication with clients. The integration of digital technologies into social work is driven by the necessity to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving information society, especially as clients increasingly access services and information through online platforms (Wusu, 2019).

Social media allows social workers to reach broader audiences and foster awareness about social issues such as child abuse, gender-based violence, mental health stigma, and poverty. In Nigeria, where traditional media may not adequately highlight the plight of marginalized groups, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have empowered social workers and activists to amplify their voices and drive advocacy campaigns. According to Olaseni and Adebayo (2020), Nigerian social workers utilize platforms such as Twitter to mobilize youth for policy change and public awareness, as demonstrated during the #EndSARS protests where issues of police brutality were brought to national and global attention.

Furthermore, social media has provided a new avenue for community outreach, especially in contexts where physical interactions are limited, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. It offers a dynamic and interactive means of promoting mental health awareness, substance abuse prevention, and access to welfare services. Olowu and Gbadegesin (2021) emphasize that during the pandemic, social workers in Nigeria leveraged WhatsApp and Facebook to maintain counseling services, provide crisis intervention, and conduct virtual support groups, thereby minimizing service disruption.

Social media also facilitates professional development and peer learning within the field of social work. Nigerian practitioners now participate in online forums, webinars, and professional groups where they share best practices, research findings, and policy updates. These digital networks support continuous learning and allow for cross-regional collaboration. As observed by Okafor and Udeh (2019), the Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASoW) has expanded its presence on social media, enabling social workers to access resources and engage in national discourse on social policy reforms.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Social media is an integral part of the daily routine of many students in the University of Benin. However, alongside its benefits, it serves as a source of sexually explicit content that is often consumed without regulation or guidance. Reports from various campus counseling units have highlighted rising incidents of sexting, addiction to pornography, early sexual initiation, and declining academic focus among students. Despite the growing prevalence of this issue, there is a significant gap in empirical research that focuses on how exposure to sexual content on social media impacts students specifically within a Nigerian University context. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the nature, extent, and consequences of such exposure on students at the University of Benin (Okon, 2020).

In the modern era, social media platforms have emerged as dominant forces shaping interpersonal communication, lifestyle choices, and socio-cultural norms, especially among the youth. These platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter (X), and YouTube, have become embedded in the daily routines of students, acting as avenues for entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. While these platforms offer benefits such as instant connectivity and educational exposure, they have also facilitated the widespread dissemination

of sexually explicit and suggestive content. This unregulated exposure has raised significant concerns regarding its psychological, behavioral, and academic implications for young people, particularly those in transitional phases of life such as teenage University students (Okoye, 2021). At the University of Benin, where a significant portion of the student population falls within the teenage demographic, the implications of continuous exposure to sexual content via social media are yet to be thoroughly examined, even as anecdotal evidence and informal observations suggest emerging patterns of behavioral and academic disruptions.

During this period, they are especially susceptible to the influences of media portrayals, including those that idealize sexual behavior, physical appearance, and romantic relationships (Alabi, 2022). Social media, with its algorithmic emphasis on provocative and engaging content, often places sexually explicit material directly in the view of teenage users, even without their intentional search for such content. This is exacerbated by the use of trends, hashtags, and viral challenges that frequently revolve around themes of sexuality, relationships, and body aesthetics. The exposure is often not mediated by educational or parental guidance, particularly within University environments where students experience increased independence and reduced oversight. Thus, many students in universities like the University of Benin are navigating the pressures of adulthood, academic demands,

and personal growth amidst an onslaught of digital stimuli that may not be age-appropriate or psychologically beneficial (Michael, 2020).

A key concern is the behavioral consequence of this exposure. Scholars have noted that frequent interaction with sexual content can normalize risky sexual behaviors, influence adolescents' perception of sex and relationships, and lower the threshold for sexual experimentation (Adeoye & Oguntunde, 2019). University students, driven by the desire to emulate what they observe online or gain validation through social engagement, may adopt behaviors such as sexting, casual dating, and public display of provocative personas. The social capital often associated with these behaviors on digital platforms may further entrench them into daily routines, diminishing their perception of potential risks such as sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, or emotional trauma. Moreover, behaviors influenced by digital sexual content may conflict with prevailing cultural and religious values, leading to internal conflicts, identity crises, and potential ostracization from familial and academic communities (Olaleye and Ajuwon, 2020).

Another pressing issue is the psychological and emotional impact of continuous exposure to sexual content on social media. Adolescents who are bombarded with idealized representations of bodies and relationships may develop insecurities, anxiety, depression, or self-esteem issues due to unfavorable comparisons (Chukwuma & Umeh, 2020). This is particularly significant in an academic environment where self-confidence and mental stability are critical for sustained academic engagement and performance. Students who become emotionally distressed as a result of online interactions may withdraw from academic activities, experience sleep disturbances, or engage in substance abuse as coping mechanisms (Nnebue, 2022). In extreme cases, this can lead to academic failure or mental health breakdowns, which are often not adequately addressed in the University system due to limited resources or stigma associated with counseling services.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study is to examine the effect of sexual content on social media on students in the University of Benin. The specific objectives are to:

1. assess the level of exposure of students in the University of Benin to sexual content on social media

2. identify the types of sexual content commonly encountered by students on social media
3. examine the psychological and social effects of such content on students' attitudes and behaviors
4. investigate the relationship between exposure to sexual content and academic performance among students
5. examine the role of social workers in reducing the negative effect of sexual content on students.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the extent of exposure of students in the University of Benin to sexual content on social media?
2. What are the common types of sexual content accessed by these students?
3. What is the influence of exposure to sexual content on their social behavior and mental well-being?
4. What is the relationship between the consumption of sexual content on social media and academic performance?

5. What is the role of social workers in reducing the negative effects of social content on students?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is of considerable significance to several stakeholders. For University administrators and educators, it will provide insights into the non-academic factors affecting student performance and well-being. For parents and guardians, it will highlight the need for more proactive digital guidance and communication with students about online content. Policymakers and curriculum developers may also use the findings to design age-appropriate interventions and media literacy programs. Lastly, this research will add to the growing body of literature on digital media influence and youth behavior in Nigeria, especially in tertiary institutions.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

This research is limited to teenage students aged 15–19 currently enrolled in the University of Benin. The study focuses specifically on their exposure to sexual content through social media platforms and examines the psychological, behavioral, and academic implications. It does not extend to students above the teenage age range or those who do not actively use social media. Furthermore, the

study is restricted to social media platforms and does not include traditional media like television or magazines.

### **1.7 Operational Definition of Terms**

**Students:** A student is a person who is formally engaged in learning, typically enrolled in a school, college, University, or other educational institution.

**Sexual Content:** Any media material that depicts or implies sexual acts, nudity, sexually suggestive behavior, or language, whether explicit or implied.

**Social Media:** Online platforms and applications such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat that allow users to share content and communicate.

**Academic Performance:** The measurable outcomes of a student's educational progress, often reflected in grades, test scores, and overall engagement with academic activities.

**Exposure:** The frequency and extent to which individuals come into contact with or consume sexual content on social media.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Concept of Social Media**

Social media has become an integral part of modern human interaction, communication, and information dissemination. It refers to web-based and mobile technologies that enable the creation, sharing, and exchange of user-generated content in virtual communities and networks. Social media platforms are designed to foster interactive dialogues, promote connectivity, and support a variety of multimedia formats, including text, images, video, and audio (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2018). Over the past two decades, social media has rapidly evolved from basic communication tools to complex ecosystems that influence personal behavior, societal values, political ideologies, and cultural norms. The development and widespread adoption of these platforms have fundamentally altered how people interact and access information, particularly among younger populations such as University students (Alabi, 2020).

The emergence of social media dates back to the early 2000s with the launch of platforms like Friendster, MySpace, and LinkedIn, followed by the global explosion of Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. These

early platforms set the stage for a communication revolution, enabling users to create personal profiles, share their thoughts, and connect with others across geographic boundaries. Over time, newer platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and WhatsApp expanded the functionality and appeal of social media, especially among students who found these tools convenient for real-time communication, identity exploration, and peer engagement (Eke *et al*, 2019). These platforms have not only diversified the way information is shared but also increased the speed and reach of communication, making it possible to connect with millions of people instantly.

At the heart of social media is the principle of user-generated content. Unlike traditional media where content is created and distributed by professionals, social media empowers users to act as both consumers and producers of content. This participatory culture has democratized information sharing and provided individuals with unprecedented access to platforms where they can express themselves freely and influence public discourse. According to Okoro & Nwafor (2021), this shift from passive consumption to active participation has profound implications for society, as it reshapes power dynamics, amplifies marginalized voices, and fosters grassroots movements. However, it also presents challenges related to misinformation, cyberbullying, and the proliferation of harmful or

inappropriate content, particularly in the absence of effective regulation and digital literacy.

Social media is characterized by several key features, including interactivity, immediacy, user-centricity, and network effects. Interactivity allows users to comment, like, share, and respond to content in real time, creating dynamic and ongoing conversations. Immediacy refers to the near-instantaneous nature of communication on these platforms, which can be both empowering and overwhelming. User-centricity means that content is tailored to individual preferences through algorithms that track behavior, interests, and engagement patterns. Finally, network effects describe the value of a platform increasing as more users join and interact. These features have made social media particularly appealing to adolescents, who often seek affirmation, belonging, and visibility during a critical phase of identity development (Ibrahim, 2022).

The use of social media among students is especially notable due to its integration into nearly every aspect of their lives. From maintaining friendships to accessing news and entertainment, social media serves as a digital extension of their offline experiences. Studies have shown that students spend a significant portion of their daily lives engaged with social media, often across multiple platforms. According to the Pew Research Center (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2018), over 95% of students in

developed nations have access to a smartphone, and more than 89% use at least one social media platform daily. In Nigeria, the increase in smartphone penetration and the availability of low-cost data plans have similarly expanded social media usage among youths, making it a central component of youth culture and interaction.

The content shared on social media is as diverse as its user base. While many users engage with educational, motivational, and entertaining content, there is also a significant presence of sexualized and explicit material. This includes images, videos, and texts that depict or allude to sexual acts, provocative body displays, or romanticized sexual relationships. This content is often popularized through influencers, celebrities, and user-generated trends that receive wide visibility due to algorithmic amplification. For students, particularly those in University settings such as the University of Benin, constant exposure to such content can influence their perceptions of sexuality, relationships, and self-worth (Okenwa, 2020). The allure of validation through likes, shares, and comments may further encourage the sharing of similar content by students themselves, fostering a cycle of digital sexual expression that is often unregulated and misunderstood.

From a psychological perspective, social media has both positive and negative implications. On one hand, it provides a platform for social support, self-expression, and community building, which can be beneficial for mental health and social integration. On the other hand, excessive use or exposure to harmful content can lead to issues such as anxiety, depression, body dissatisfaction, and cyber victimization. These effects are particularly pronounced among adolescents who are still developing cognitive maturity and emotional regulation skills. According to Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020), social media use is significantly associated with poor mental health outcomes in adolescents, including symptoms of anxiety and depression, especially when it involves passive use, online harassment, or negative social comparison.

Furthermore, the relationship between social media and academic performance has attracted considerable scholarly attention. While social media can serve educational purposes, such as facilitating collaboration, knowledge sharing, and access to learning resources, its misuse can lead to distraction, procrastination, and reduced academic engagement. Students who spend excessive time on social media may find it difficult to concentrate on studies, meet academic deadlines, or maintain a balanced lifestyle. The addictive design of platforms, characterized by endless scrolling, notifications, and gamified interactions, contributes to time

mismanagement and diminished productivity. In University environments, where academic success requires self-discipline and focus, these challenges can have long-term implications on students' academic trajectories (Adewoyin & Adefemi, 2019).

In the Nigerian context, the rapid adoption of social media has not been matched with sufficient education on digital responsibility and media literacy. Many students lack the critical skills needed to evaluate content, understand the implications of digital footprints, or navigate online relationships safely. Parental monitoring is often limited by generational gaps in technology usage, and institutional policies on digital behavior are either non-existent or poorly enforced. As a result, many Nigerian University students are left to navigate a complex digital environment with little guidance, increasing their vulnerability to the negative effects of social media, including exposure to sexual content and its psychological and academic consequences (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2018).

Social media is a multifaceted phenomenon that has redefined communication, culture, and social interaction in the 21st century. Its significance among students, especially those in University settings, cannot be overstated. While it provides opportunities for learning, creativity, and connection, it also presents risks related to exposure to sexual content, mental health challenges, and academic disruption.

A nuanced understanding of social media and its impact is therefore essential for parents, educators, policymakers, and students themselves to harness its benefits while mitigating its risks (Okenwa, 2020).

### **2.1.1 Exposure of Sexual Content on Social Media on students**

Sexual content on social media has become a prominent and increasingly complex phenomenon in the digital age. It encompasses a wide array of material that includes explicit depictions of sexual acts, suggestive language, provocative imagery, and innuendos that evoke sexual connotations. With the proliferation of internet-enabled devices and the rise of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook, users are frequently exposed to sexual content either intentionally or inadvertently. This exposure is particularly prevalent among adolescents and young adults, including University students, who make up a significant proportion of social media users. The ubiquity of such content poses significant social, psychological, and educational implications for young people navigating formative years of identity, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships (Adebayo & Folarin, 2020).

The dimensions of sexual content on social media are vast and can be categorized into various forms ranging from overtly pornographic material to subtler expressions of sexuality, such as sexualized selfies, flirtatious captions, and romantic role-plays. One of the most discussed dimensions is user-generated content, which refers to images, videos, and texts created and shared by users themselves, often to gain attention, validation, or social capital through likes, shares, and comments. This phenomenon, particularly among students and University students, has been fueled by the growing desire for online visibility and social approval. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok incentivize visual appeal and sensational content, thereby promoting the sharing of sexually suggestive material that conforms to prevailing beauty standards and gender norms (Eze & Nnadi, 2022).

Another dimension of sexual content on social media is influencer and celebrity-driven sexual imagery. Social media influencers, many of whom gain popularity through provocative content, set trends that are quickly adopted by their followers. Celebrities frequently post sexualized photoshoots, music videos, and fashion that emphasize sexuality, often blurring the line between empowerment and objectification. Young users, especially females, may emulate these practices, seeing them as aspirational or empowering, without fully grasping the potential

risks, such as exploitation, online harassment, or digital permanence of shared content. According to Chukwuma & Umeh (2020), the sexualization of women in media and social platforms can shape adolescent girls' self-perception and influence how they view their bodies and sexuality.

Commercial sexual content is another critical dimension. Social media platforms are increasingly used for marketing and advertising sexualized products and services, including lingerie, dating apps, adult entertainment, and even cosmetic surgery. These advertisements often employ sexually suggestive imagery and language to attract attention, further normalizing sexual content as part of everyday digital interaction. While some users engage with such content consensually, others, particularly minors, are exposed to it without adequate controls or consent. The algorithms employed by social media companies are designed to maximize engagement, often prioritizing sensational or controversial content, including that which is sexual in nature. As Okoye (2018) notes, content moderation on social media is uneven, and policies on nudity and sexual content are inconsistently enforced, leaving significant gaps in protecting vulnerable users.

The anonymity and immediacy of social media also facilitate dimensions of sexual content such as sexting and online sexual solicitation. Sexting involves sending sexually explicit messages or images, often between peers, and is increasingly common among students and University students. While sometimes consensual, these exchanges can easily be shared without consent, leading to reputational harm, emotional distress, and in some cases, legal consequences. Sexual solicitation, which involves unwanted sexual advances or grooming by adults toward minors, is another serious concern facilitated by social media's private messaging features and anonymity. Studies have shown that such experiences can have severe psychological impacts on victims, including anxiety, depression, and trauma (Bello & Musa, 2020).

The dimensions of sexual content on social media are diverse and multifaceted, spanning user-generated posts, celebrity culture, commercial advertising, and exploitative practices. These dimensions interact in ways that deeply affect how students, especially those in University settings, perceive and engage with sexuality. Given the wide-reaching implications, it is imperative to foster digital literacy, enforce stricter content regulation, and provide psychological support for young users to navigate the challenges posed by sexual content in the digital realm (Okenwa, 2020).

### **2.1.2 Types of Social Content on Social Media**

Social media has revolutionized communication by creating a dynamic platform where individuals, organizations, and communities interact, share, and consume information. The types of social content that circulate on these platforms have evolved over the years to meet changing user preferences, technological advancements, and societal trends. Social content can be understood as any material whether text, image, video, or interactive media created and shared on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, and others to inform, entertain, engage, or influence audiences. The diversity of content on social media reflects the multifaceted purposes users seek to achieve, ranging from personal expression to marketing, activism, and knowledge dissemination (Rahman, 2024).

One prominent form of social content is informational content, which provides facts, data, and news updates. This category includes news articles, blog posts, educational infographics, research summaries, and updates from credible organizations. Informational content serves to inform and educate audiences about current events, emerging trends, scientific discoveries, or community updates. It is often used by media houses, governments, non-governmental organizations, and

thought leaders to shape public opinion and create awareness. The rise of social media as a news source has transformed how individuals access and engage with information, shifting from traditional broadcast media to more interactive, real-time platforms. For example, during health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, informational content on platforms like Twitter and Instagram became critical for disseminating public health guidelines and countering misinformation. Recent studies have highlighted that the credibility and timeliness of such content play a significant role in shaping audience trust and engagement (Nguyen & Ho, 2024).

Another key type is entertainment content, which aims to amuse, relax, or captivate audiences. This includes memes, short videos, music clips, challenges, humorous posts, and behind-the-scenes celebrity content. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts thrive on this type of content due to their algorithmic emphasis on virality and user engagement. Entertainment content has a powerful emotional pull, often becoming viral and shaping cultural trends, language, and humor. Recent analyses reveal that short-form videos dominate attention spans, particularly among younger demographics, with platforms optimizing algorithms to prioritize entertaining snippets (Kim & Park, 2023). However, the emphasis on entertainment can sometimes lead to the proliferation

of low-quality or sensationalized content aimed primarily at generating clicks rather than adding meaningful value.

Educational content represents another major category on social media, bridging the gap between traditional learning and digital engagement. Tutorials, how-to videos, webinars, explainer graphics, and academic discussions fall into this category. Content creators, educational institutions, and professionals use platforms like LinkedIn, YouTube, and even Instagram to share insights, teach skills, and promote lifelong learning. The popularity of microlearning formats has increased as users prefer easily digestible, visually appealing lessons that can be consumed on the go. Educational content plays a significant role in professional development, skill acquisition, and social empowerment, especially in regions with limited access to formal education. Studies show that educational videos on platforms such as YouTube have significantly impacted self-paced learning trends and contributed to the rise of edutainment content that blends education with entertainment (Singh & Zhao, 2025).

Promotional or marketing content is one of the most pervasive forms of social content, particularly in the age of influencer marketing and e-commerce. Brands and businesses create sponsored posts, advertisements, product demonstrations,

and influencer collaborations to promote their goods or services. This type of content is often integrated into users' feeds through targeted advertising algorithms, which analyze user behavior to deliver personalized ads. The growth of social commerce has further blurred the lines between content and shopping, making platforms like Instagram and TikTok essential marketing tools. Consumers increasingly rely on user-generated content, reviews, and influencer recommendations as part of their decision-making process. Recent studies have indicated that authentic, user-centered promotional content has higher engagement and conversion rates compared to traditional corporate advertising (Rahman & Chen, 2024).

User-generated content (UGC) is a unique and powerful form of social content because it is created voluntarily by users rather than brands or organizations. This includes reviews, testimonials, personal stories, blogs, and posts shared by everyday individuals. UGC fosters trust, authenticity, and community engagement as audiences tend to perceive peer-generated content as more credible than sponsored material. Platforms like Reddit, Trip Advisor, and TikTok have popularized this model, where users actively participate in creating narratives about brands, places, and experiences. The influence of UGC on purchase

decisions and brand reputation has become a central focus of digital marketing strategies (Garcia & Smith, 2023).

Activism and advocacy content has also gained traction in recent years as social media has become a key tool for mobilizing change and raising awareness about social, political, and environmental issues. Hashtag movements, petitions, awareness campaigns, and live streams of protests are examples of how digital platforms amplify voices that were historically marginalized. Content under this category often sparks discussions, fosters solidarity, and pressures policymakers to act. Movements such as MeToo, BlackLives Matter, and climate change campaigns exemplify how activism content transcends borders and engages global audiences. Recent research underscores that while activism content raises awareness effectively, its impact is often limited by algorithmic suppression and the transient nature of online trends (Lopez & Wang, 2024).

Interactive content is another emerging category that prioritizes user participation and engagement over passive consumption. Polls, quizzes, interactive videos, augmented reality filters, and live Q&A sessions encourage active involvement, making users feel like co-creators of the content. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have integrated features that allow audiences to interact with brands and

influencers in real time, fostering a sense of community and personalization. This content type has been particularly effective for market research, customer feedback, and brand engagement. Research suggests that interactive content significantly boosts recall and satisfaction compared to static posts (Ahmed & Johnson, 2025).

### **2.1.3 Psychological and Social Effects of Exposure to Sexual Content**

Exposure to sexual content, particularly through social media platforms, has profound psychological and social implications for students. In an era where adolescents have unprecedented access to digital media, including explicit and suggestive material, the impact on their emotional well-being, identity development, and interpersonal relationships is becoming increasingly evident. Social media content, both user-generated and commercial, often includes sexualized images, messages, and behaviors that students encounter daily. These encounters can shape their perceptions of sexuality, influence their behavior, and affect their mental and social development in various ways (Alode and Aladenika, 2021).

Psychologically, frequent exposure to sexual content can influence a student's cognitive and emotional development. During adolescence, individuals are particularly susceptible to external influences as they form their self-identity and begin to understand their sexual feelings and roles in relationships. Constant exposure to idealized or unrealistic portrayals of sexuality can distort students' understanding of sex, body image, and intimacy. Research indicates that adolescents who consume high levels of sexual media content are more likely to internalize unhealthy sexual norms, experience confusion about appropriate sexual behavior, and develop a skewed sense of what constitutes consensual and respectful relationships (Okonkwo & Ibeh, 2020). Moreover, sexual content in media often fails to portray the emotional and relational aspects of sexuality, leading students to associate sex with physical appearance and performance rather than connection and communication.

Mental health concerns are another major psychological effect linked to sexual content exposure. Studies have found a correlation between the frequent viewing of sexualized content and increased rates of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem among adolescents, particularly females. Teenage girls, for example, may feel pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards and sexualize themselves in order to gain validation and acceptance on platforms such as Instagram and

TikTok. This behavior, sometimes referred to as "self-objectification," has been associated with body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and increased vulnerability to mental distress (Onyeka & Bello, 2019). Boys, on the other hand, may feel pressured to exhibit dominance or sexual prowess, which can lead to issues related to aggression and emotional suppression.

In addition to individual psychological outcomes, exposure to sexual content also affects social relationships and behaviors among students. One of the most evident effects is the normalization of sexting and sexually suggestive communication. As students witness their peers engaging in or sharing provocative content, they may feel encouraged or pressured to do the same, leading to risky digital behavior. These actions can have serious social consequences, including cyberbullying, harassment, reputational damage, and even legal issues when explicit content involves minors.

Social dynamics among students are also influenced by their exposure to sexual content. Peer influence and the desire for social acceptance can drive adolescents to engage in behavior that they may not fully understand or consent to. This can lead to exploitative relationships or coercive situations, particularly when there is a power imbalance between individuals. Furthermore, repeated exposure to casual sexual encounters in media may lead students to develop cynical views of

relationships, promoting the idea that physical attraction is more important than emotional connection or mutual respect. These views can hinder the development of healthy, communicative relationships, both during adolescence and into adulthood (Odetola, 2018).

#### **2.1.4 Relationship Between Exposure to Sexual Content and Academic Performance**

Exposure to sexual content, particularly through digital and social media platforms, has emerged as a significant area of concern in understanding the behavioral, cognitive, and academic development of adolescents and young adults. The proliferation of explicit and suggestive materials online ranging from music videos, social media posts, movies, and advertisements to explicit websites has dramatically increased the likelihood of young individuals encountering sexualized imagery and narratives. Academic performance, on the other hand, is a multifaceted construct that encompasses cognitive engagement, concentration, study habits, time management, motivation, and overall scholastic achievement. The intersection between exposure to sexual content and academic performance raises critical questions about how consumption of such content may influence

students' focus, time allocation, cognitive priorities, and emotional well-being (Chiossi, 2023).

Several studies have suggested that repeated exposure to sexual content can contribute to distraction, decreased study time, and impaired attention spans among students. The pervasive nature of sexually suggestive materials on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Snapchat often competes with academic-related activities for students' attention. Adolescents and University students who spend significant time engaging with such content may experience diminished academic engagement due to the diversion of mental and emotional resources toward sexualized themes rather than educational pursuits. Moreover, exposure to explicit content has been linked with increased curiosity, risk-taking behaviors, and altered social priorities, which can shift focus from academic goals to peer approval or romantic exploration (Hameed, 2022).

Psychologically, frequent interaction with sexual content has the potential to influence cognitive schemas and reward pathways, leading to compulsive viewing habits or excessive social media use. These habits, in turn, may result in procrastination, decreased sleep quality, and reduced academic productivity. For instance, students may stay awake late at night consuming explicit or suggestive

media, leading to sleep deprivation that negatively affects concentration, memory retention, and classroom participation (Haji, 2025).

Conversely, it is important to note that not all exposure to sexual content leads to negative academic outcomes. In some educational or controlled contexts, exposure to scientifically grounded sexual education materials can enhance knowledge, promote responsible decision-making, and foster a healthier understanding of sexuality, relationships, and personal boundaries. When appropriately framed, such content may support students' psychosocial development without compromising academic goals. The challenge lies in distinguishing between explicit, entertainment-driven content and educational, development-oriented content (Lukose, 2025).

Recent empirical research has highlighted that the relationship between exposure to sexual content and academic performance is often mediated by variables such as screen time, self-control, parental guidance, and peer influence. Students with higher levels of self-regulation and time management skills are less likely to let exposure to explicit content interfere with their studies. Similarly, parental monitoring and institutional policies that promote digital literacy can mitigate the adverse effects of excessive or inappropriate exposure. A 2024 study by Adeyemi

and Huang found that adolescents who reported frequent exposure to non-educational sexual content on social media platforms exhibited lower grade point averages (GPAs) and higher levels of academic procrastination compared to their peers with minimal exposure. However, the same study revealed that students who engaged with evidence-based sexual education content did not experience significant academic disruption (Zhang, 2024).

Cultural context also plays a critical role in shaping this relationship. In more conservative societies, the stigma surrounding sexual content may lead to secrecy, guilt, or stress when individuals are exposed, further affecting mental health and academic focus. In contrast, in more open societies with comprehensive sexual education programs, students may develop resilience and discernment in navigating sexual content online, reducing the potential for negative academic impact (Kuş, 2025).

### **2.1.5 The Role of Social Workers in Reducing the Negative Effect of Sexual Content**

Social workers play a crucial role in addressing and reducing the negative impacts of sexual content exposure, particularly among vulnerable populations such as adolescents and young adults. The ubiquity of sexualized media, pornography, and

exploitative material has raised concerns about its influence on behavior, relationships, and mental health. Social workers intervene at multiple levels individual, family, community, and policy to mitigate these harms and promote healthier sexual development.

One of the most important approaches is the application of trauma-informed care, which emphasizes safety, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity in working with individuals affected by harmful exposure to sexual content. Trauma-informed practice ensures that survivors of sexual exploitation or harmful media exposure are not re-traumatized during intervention, while also empowering them to regain agency over their lives (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). By integrating trauma-informed frameworks into counseling, advocacy, and education, social workers create safe spaces for clients to process their experiences and rebuild resilience.

Another key role lies in the provision of comprehensive sexuality education. Unlike abstinence-only models, comprehensive education addresses consent, boundaries, gender norms, and healthy relationships. Evidence indicates that such programs reduce risky sexual behaviors, delay initiation of sexual activity, and encourage responsible decision-making (UNESCO, 2018; Haberland & Rogow, 2015). Social workers, especially those in school and youth settings, are well

placed to advocate for age-appropriate curricula that not only inform young people but also challenge harmful stereotypes perpetuated by sexualized media (Oluwatobi, 2023).

Social workers are also actively involved in interventions for youth who engage in harmful sexual behaviors, which are sometimes linked to early and unregulated exposure to sexual content. Evidence-based approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), multisystemic therapy, and trauma-focused interventions help reduce harmful behaviors and promote rehabilitation (Wainwright & Clough, 2023). By involving families and communities, social workers ensure a holistic support system that reduces recidivism and addresses the underlying causes of harmful behaviors.

For adolescents and young people who have been victims of sexual exploitation, social workers coordinate integrated services such as case management, psychoeducation, group therapy, and residential support. Research shows that these interventions foster recovery, reduce trauma symptoms, and build protective factors when they are culturally responsive and gender-sensitive (Countryman-Roswurm & Shaffer, 2015). In this sense, social workers do not only provide immediate support but also advocate for systemic changes to strengthen protections for exploited youth.

Another significant role is empowerment and advocacy for survivors of sexual harassment and exploitation. Social workers help survivors rebuild self-esteem and recognize their strengths while linking them to legal, health, and psychosocial resources (Jabbar, 2022). Empowerment strategies are critical because they move survivors from positions of silence and vulnerability toward active participation in shaping their futures.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

The advent of social media has revolutionized communication, particularly among adolescents and young adults. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, they also expose users to sexually explicit content, which can influence their sexual behaviors and attitudes. This review examines empirical studies focusing on the impact of sexual content on social media on students, with a particular emphasis on University students in Nigeria, including those at the University of Benin.

Adegboyega (2019) conducted a research in other Nigerian universities corroborates these findings. For instance, a study in Imo State revealed that 100% of surveyed undergraduates were aware of social media platforms, with Facebook being the most favored. The study found significant associations between social

media use and sexual activity, types of sexual acts practiced, and the number of sexual partners.

Onasoga (2022) carried out a study involving 395 youths found that social media significantly influenced sexual behavior. The findings indicated that social media led students to send erotic messages, watch pornographic films, and engage in risky sexual behaviors such as masturbation.

Aluko (2018) conducted a study in Ilorin, Kwara State, revealed that all respondents had internet access, with 86.8% accessing it via mobile phones. Only 32.9% of the respondents had high exposure to sexual content on social media, with a significant gender disparity favoring males. The study also showed a significant association between exposure to sexual content on social media and risky sexual behavior among undergraduate students.

Duru (2020) conducted a study which highlighted that such exposure could lead to psychological trauma, shame, and increased instances of masturbation among students. Furthermore, the normalization of casual sexual encounters on social media platforms can distort students' perceptions of healthy sexual relationships, leading to emotional distress and social challenges. Gender differences play a significant role in the exposure to and effects of sexual content on social media.

Studies consistently show that male students are more likely to seek out and engage with sexually explicit content online (Adigwe, 2021). This increased exposure correlates with higher instances of risky sexual behaviors among males compared to their female counterparts. Understanding these gender disparities is crucial for developing targeted interventions. Social media platforms can reinforce traditional sexual scripts, such as male dominance and female submissiveness, influencing users' attitudes and behaviors. Continuous exposure to these scripts can shape students' perceptions of sexuality, potentially leading to behaviors that align with these portrayed norms (Michael, 2020).

Addressing the influence of sexual content on social media requires a multifaceted approach. Universities should integrate comprehensive sexual education into their curricula, emphasizing media literacy to help students critically assess the content they encounter online (Wusu, 2019). Parents and guardians should engage in open discussions with their wards about the potential risks associated with consuming sexual content on social media. Government agencies should enforce regulations that limit the accessibility of explicit content on social media platforms, especially to underage users. Additionally, universities should provide counseling services to support students dealing with the psychological effects of exposure to sexual content online (Alode, 2021).

## **2.3 Theoretical Review**

The advent of social media has revolutionized communication, offering unprecedented access to information and interaction. Among students, particularly those in tertiary institutions like the University of Benin, social media serves as a primary source of information, including content related to sexuality. This exposure has raised concerns about its potential influence on adolescents' sexual behaviors and attitudes. To understand this phenomenon, several theoretical perspectives provide insight into how sexual content on social media may affect students (Brown & Bobkowski 2018).

Albert Bandura, a highly influential Canadian-American psychologist, is best known for developing the Social Learning Theory (SLT), which transformed the understanding of how individuals acquire and perform behaviors. Born in 1925, Bandura made significant contributions to psychology, particularly in the domains of social behavior, learning, and cognitive development. His groundbreaking Bobo doll experiment in the 1960s demonstrated that children tend to imitate aggressive behaviors observed in adults, especially when those behaviors were rewarded or went unpunished. This experiment became a cornerstone for understanding observational learning and highlighted the importance of social influence in

shaping behavior. Bandura's work shifted the focus of psychology from strict behaviorism, which emphasized direct reinforcement, to a broader model that incorporates cognitive processes, environmental factors, and observational learning (Bandura, 2019).

Social Learning Theory is based on the idea that behavior is learned by watching others, retaining that information, and later reproducing it. The process involves attention, where an individual must focus on the behavior being modeled; retention, where the behavior is remembered; reproduction, where the behavior is imitated; and motivation, where reinforcement or lack of punishment encourages the behavior to continue. Bandura also introduced the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to a person's belief in their ability to execute specific behaviors successfully. High self-efficacy can lead individuals to adopt and persist in certain actions, while low self-efficacy may deter them from trying (Bussey & Bandura 2018).

In the context of social media, students are exposed to various sexual behaviors portrayed by peers, celebrities, and influencers. These portrayals can serve as models for behavior, especially when such behaviors appear to be rewarded or go unpunished. A study conducted in Ilorin, Kwara State, revealed that undergraduate

students exposed to sexual content on social media were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, supporting the applicability of Social Learning Theory in this context (Onasoga et al., 2021).

Within the context of social media, students and undergraduates are frequently exposed to sexual content shared by peers, celebrities, influencers, and even strangers. This exposure provides models of sexual behavior that can shape young people's attitudes and practices (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). For instance, when influencers portray sexualized content and receive positive reinforcement in the form of likes, shares, and comments, adolescents may internalize the behavior as socially rewarding and acceptable. Similarly, the absence of visible negative consequences in online portrayals reduces the perceived risks of such behavior, thereby normalizing it among impressionable audiences (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2013).

Empirical evidence supports this theoretical application. A study conducted in Ilorin, Kwara State, revealed that undergraduate students who were frequently exposed to sexually explicit content on social media were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as unprotected intercourse and multiple partnerships (Onasoga et al., 2021). These findings underscore the role of observational

learning in shaping sexual attitudes and practices among youth, illustrating how online exposure can translate into offline behaviors.

Furthermore, research indicates that the process of social learning is reinforced by peer influence, where young people discuss and validate the content they consume online. For example, sexually explicit memes, videos, and posts often become topics of conversation among students, reinforcing curiosity and reducing inhibitions toward sexual experimentation (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). In this way, the reinforcement aspect of SLT becomes evident, as peer approval further strengthens the likelihood of imitating observed behaviors.

The applicability of Social Learning Theory in this context also extends to the idea of self-efficacy, another of Bandura's key concepts. As students observe others seemingly engaging in sexual behavior without repercussions, their confidence in performing similar behaviors (sexual self-efficacy) increases. This perception can lead them to adopt practices that put them at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, and other consequences (Mesch, 2009).

Social Learning Theory provides a robust framework for understanding how sexual content on social media influences students and undergraduates. Through observation, modeling, and reinforcement, young people internalize and

sometimes replicate the sexual behaviors they encounter online. Studies such as those by Onasoga et al. (2021) in Kwara State provide empirical evidence that these theoretical propositions are not only abstract but observable in real-world contexts, making SLT a relevant and powerful lens for analyzing the impact of sexual content on social media.

In Nigeria, cultural and religious norms traditionally discourage open discussions about sex, leading many adolescents to seek information from alternative sources such as social media. This reliance on social media for sexual information can result in the adoption of behaviors that may not align with societal expectations or health guidelines. A study in Jos, Plateau State, revealed that a significant number of University students acknowledged the influence of media on their sexual behaviors, with many citing the internet and social media as primary sources of information on contraceptives and sexual practices (Okonkwo et al., 2020).

Gender differences have been observed in the consumption and impact of sexual content on social media. Research indicates that male adolescents are more likely to engage with pornographic content, while female adolescents may be more influenced by romanticized portrayals of relationships. These differences underscore the need for gender-sensitive interventions. A study in Lagos

highlighted that boys engaged more with pornographic content, whereas girls were more involved in social networking, suggesting varying patterns of media consumption and associated risks (Adigwe, 2024).

To mitigate the potential negative impacts of exposure to sexual content on social media, it is essential for stakeholders at the University of Benin to implement comprehensive sexual education programs that address media literacy. Such programs should aim to equip students with the skills to critically analyze media content, understand the constructed nature of media messages, and make informed decisions regarding their sexual health (Onasoga et al. (2021).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The purpose of using this design to obtain relevant data that describe and analyze the exposure to sexual content on social media and its psychological and behavioral effects on teenage students at the University of Benin. A survey approach is ideal as it enables the researcher to gather information directly from a relatively large population in a natural setting without manipulating variables.

#### **3.2 Area of the Study**

The focus of this study was the University of Benin (UNIBEN), located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Established on 23 November 1970, UNIBEN was described as an institution that began as the Midwest Institute of Technology and was conferred full university status on 1 July 1971, later transitioning to a federal institution on 1 April 1975. The University was situated across two campuses, Ugbowo (main campus) and Ekehuan, and accommodated approximately 60,000 to over 77,000 students, according to institutional and external estimates. The student population comprised both full-time and part-time learners across undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

UNIBEN was organized into 15 faculties, covering key academic areas such as Arts, Education, Engineering, Law, Life Sciences, Management Sciences, Pharmacy, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Basic Medical Sciences, Dentistry, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, and Agriculture. The institution also hosted several Centers of Excellence, such as the Center of Excellence in Reproductive Health Innovation (CERHI), which underscored its research strength in sexual and reproductive health. Additionally, the John Harris Library and the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), a multi-specialty tertiary health facility founded in 1973, contributed significantly to the academic and health-related capacity of the University.

UNIBEN's urban setting in Benin City, a thriving and rapidly growing metropolis, amplified the relevance of social media for its student population. Widespread smartphone use and expanding internet access made platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter) dominant avenues for communication, entertainment, and information, including frequent exposure to sexualized content. These demographic and technological factors made UNIBEN an ideal setting for examining how social media-mediated sexual content influenced students' sexual attitudes, behaviors, and academic trajectories.

### 3.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised undergraduate students of the University of Benin. These included male and female students between the ages of 18 and 22, amounting to an estimated 5,032 individuals (Student Affairs Division, University of Benin, 2023) who were actively engaged on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. The study specifically targeted this age group because it aligned with the conventional definition of teenage students and represented a critical stage of emotional, psychological, and sexual development, during which external influences, including media content, were likely to exert profound impacts.

### 3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = margin of error (level of precision, e.g., 0.09 for 5%)

$$1 + N(e)^2 = 1 + 40.7592 = 41.7592$$

$$n = \frac{5032}{41.7592}$$

$$n = 120.5$$

The sample size was derived using the Taro Yamane formula sampling techniques. A sample of 120 students were purposefully selected for the study.

### **3.5 Research Instrument**

The instrument that was used for this study was a self-constructed questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of Sections A and B. Section A comprised demographic data, while Section B contained items based on the research questions. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

The instrument for data collection was subjected to content validity by the researcher's supervisor and two other experts from the Department of Social Work, University of Benin, who vetted the questionnaire and suggested necessary modifications. Their corrections and suggestions were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered twice to the same group of students within an interval of two weeks. The two sets of responses were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC), and a reliability index was obtained, which indicated a high degree of consistency of the instrument.

### **3.7 Method of Data Collection**

This research utilized the questionnaire as the primary method of data collection. The questionnaires were personally distributed to the respondents, and the researcher provided guidance on how to complete them. To prevent any potential alteration or loss, the completed questionnaires were promptly retrieved. Respondents were assured that their responses were treated with the utmost confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes.

### **3.8 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The analysis employed the simple percentage method to interpret responses and draw conclusions relevant to the research questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents and analyzes data collected through the questionnaire administered to 100 students of the University of Benin. The data are presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentages. The interpretations are based on the responses provided by the respondents in line with the research questions formulated in Chapter One.

#### 4.1 Presentation of Result

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Data**

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	42%
	Female	58	58%
Age Range	15–16 years	20	20%
	17–18 years	48	48%
	19 years and above	32	32%
Faculty	Social Sciences	30	30%
	Arts	20	20%
	Education	18	18%
	Management	12	12%
	Sciences		
Level of Study	Life/Physical Sciences	20	20%
	100 level	40	40%
	200 level	30	30%
	300 level	20	20%
	400 level	10	10%

**Source: Fieldwork, 2025**

Table 4.1 shows that 58% of the respondents were female, while 42% were male. Most respondents (48%) fell within the age range of 17–18 years, suggesting that a majority are in their mid-teenage years. The respondents were drawn across several faculties, ensuring representation from various academic disciplines. The highest proportion (40%) were from the 100 level, indicating a higher concentration of new entrants who are typically more active on social media.

**Table 2: Research Question Two**

What is the extent of exposure of students in the University of Benin to sexual content on social media?

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Strongly Agree (SA)	45	45%
Agree (A)	40	40%
Disagree (D)	10	10%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	5	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Fieldwork, 2025**

The table reveals that a large majority (85%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that they are highly exposed to sexual content on social media. This shows that exposure to sexual materials is widespread among students of the University of Benin, largely due to easy access to internet-enabled devices and unrestricted social media use. Only 15%

disagreed, indicating minimal denial or limited access among a small portion of respondents.

**Table 3: Research Question Three**

What are the common types of sexual content accessed by these students?

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Nude pictures and videos	38	38%
Sexually suggestive dances/challenges	30	30%
Romantic skits and jokes	20	20%
Online sexual advertisements	12	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Fieldwork, 2025**

The findings indicate that nude pictures and videos (38%) constitute the most frequently encountered type of sexual content among students. This is followed by sexually suggestive dances and challenges (30%), commonly seen on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Romantic skits and online advertisements make up smaller proportions but remain notable contributors to sexual exposure.

**Table 4: Research Question Four**

What is the influence of exposure to such content on students' social behavior and mental well-being?

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Strongly Agree (SA)	50	50%
Agree (A)	35	35%
Disagree (D)	10	10%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	5	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Fieldwork, 2025**

A combined 85% of respondents agreed that exposure to sexual content on social media influences their social behavior and mental well-being. Respondents reported feelings of curiosity, peer pressure, anxiety, and changes in dressing and communication styles after exposure.

**Table 5: Research Question Five**

What is the relationship between the consumption of sexual content on social media and academic performance?

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Strongly Agree (SA)	40	40%
Agree (A)	37	37%
Disagree (D)	15	15%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	8	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Fieldwork, 2025**

From the data, 77% of respondents agreed that consumption of sexual content negatively affects their academic performance. Students cited distraction, loss of study time, and lack of concentration as major effects.

**Table 6: Research Question Six**

What is the role of social workers in reducing the negative effects of sexual content on students?

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Strongly Agree (SA)	48	48%
Agree (A)	40	40%
Disagree (D)	7	7%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	5	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Fieldwork, 2025**

A vast majority (88%) agreed that social workers play a vital role in mitigating the negative impact of sexual content among students. Respondents noted that social workers can engage in awareness campaigns, counseling services, and digital literacy education.

## **4.2 Summary of Findings**

The analysis reveals that most students are highly exposed to sexual content through social media. The most common forms include nude images and sexually suggestive videos. Exposure has significant influence on social behavior and mental health, leading to anxiety, self-comparison, and experimentation. There is a negative relationship between exposure to sexual content and academic performance. Social workers are perceived as essential agents in reducing these effects through guidance, counseling, and education.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

This study investigated the effect of sexual content on social media on the psychological and social life of students at the University of Benin. A total of 100 respondents participated in the study through a structured questionnaire. The findings revealed the following:

1. Students of the University of Benin are **to a great extent** exposed to sexual content on social media.
2. The most common forms of sexual content encountered are nude images, sexually suggestive dances, and romantic skits.
3. Exposure to sexual content has notable psychological and social implications, including anxiety, body image concerns, and peer pressure.
4. A strong negative relationship exists between frequent consumption of sexual content and students' academic performance.
5. Social workers play a crucial role in mitigating negative effects by providing counseling, promoting digital literacy, and advocating responsible media use.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that sexual content on social media significantly affects the psychological, social, and academic well-being of students at the University of Benin. The widespread nature of such content, coupled with inadequate digital guidance, makes students vulnerable to risky behaviors, emotional distress, and academic distraction. However, with effective intervention from social workers, educators, and parents, students can be guided toward responsible media consumption and healthier lifestyles.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

1. To address the high extent of exposure, the University of Benin should organize regular digital literacy and awareness programs to educate students on responsible social media use and the potential risks associated with exposure to sexual content.
2. Regarding the common types of sexual content accessed, the University should collaborate with student associations to promote positive online engagement and discourage the sharing or participation in sexually suggestive dances, videos, or advertisements.
3. Concerning the influence on social behavior and mental well-being, the University's counseling center should strengthen psychological support services to assist students in coping with anxiety, peer pressure, and self-esteem issues arising from exposure to sexualized media.

4. In relation to academic performance, the institution should introduce time management and self-control workshops to help students balance academic responsibilities with social media activities and minimize distractions caused by explicit content.
5. On the role of social workers, professionals in the field should actively lead intervention and sensitization programs within the University to educate students about safe digital practices, promote healthy sexual attitudes, and provide counseling for affected individuals.

#### **5.4 Suggestion for Further Study**

Subsequent research may focus on comparative studies between private and public universities, gender-based analysis of exposure patterns, and longitudinal studies on how prolonged exposure affects students' mental health and academic progress.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK  
FACULTY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

Dear Ma/Sir,

I am a undergraduate student of Social work Department in University of Benin, researching on “**Sexual Content on Social Media And Its Effect on Psychological and Social Life of Students In University of Benin**”. This study is conducted as part of the requirements for my award of BSc Degree in the University of Benin. I hereby solicit for your consent and cooperation as your responses will be used for academic purposes only and treated with utmost confidentiality. I will be glad if correct and honest information is given to enhance the quality and credibility of this thesis.

Thank you for anticipated co-operation.

**EHIMWENMA OSAZEME ISABEL**

## SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

### 1. Gender:

Male [ ] Female [ ]

### 2. Age:

16 and 20 [ ] 21 - 24 [ ] 25 - 30

## SECTION B

**Instructions:** please read each statement and tick to the option that indicates how much the statement applied to you.

SA = Strongly Agree | A = Agree | D = Disagree | SD = Strongly Disagree

S/N	QUESTION	SA	A	D	SD
<b>RQ1</b>	<b>What is the extent of exposure of students in the University of Benin to sexual content on social media?</b>				
1	I often come across sexually suggestive or explicit content while scrolling through social media.				
2	I follow or subscribe to social media accounts that regularly post sexual or romantic content.				
3	I am frequently added to group chats or pages where sexual content is shared.				
4	I see sexual content on social media even when I am not searching for it.				
5	Exposure to sexual content on social media is common among my friends and classmates.				
<b>RQ2</b>	<b>What are the common types of sexual content accessed by these students?</b>				
6	Sexually suggestive dance videos are frequently encountered by students on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.				
7	Memes and jokes with sexual innuendos are commonly shared among student peer groups online.				

8	Pornographic materials, including short video clips, are sometimes circulated in student group chats.				
9	Social media pages that promote sexually revealing fashion or nudity attract many student followers.				
10	Discussions and posts about personal sexual experiences are often visible on students' social media feeds.				
<b>RQ3</b>	<b>What is the influence of exposure to such content affect their social behavior and mental well-being?</b>				
11	Constant exposure to sexual content on social media can increase peer pressure to engage in sexual activity.				
12	Viewing sexually explicit material online has influenced the way some students behave in public or social gatherings.				
13	Exposure to sexual content contributes to low self-esteem or body image concerns among some students.				
14	Students who frequently view sexual content online may become desensitized to issues of sexual morality.				
15	Mental health challenges such as anxiety, guilt, or confusion can result from repeated exposure to online sexual content.				
<b>RQ4</b>	<b>What is the relationship between the consumption of sexual content on social media and academic performance?</b>				
16	Spending time viewing sexual content on social media reduces the time available for academic study.				
17	Students who frequently consume sexually explicit content are more likely to be distracted during lectures or assignments.				
18	Academic focus can be negatively affected by addiction to sexually themed online material.				
19	Excessive attention to sexual content on social platforms may lead to a				

	decline in academic performance.				
20	There is a noticeable link between poor academic engagement and frequent exposure to sexual content on social media among students.				
<b>RQ5</b>	<b>What is the role of social workers in reducing the negative effects of social content on students?</b>				
21	Social workers play a vital role in guiding students on responsible use of social media.				
22	Social workers help in educating parents and guardians about the dangers of harmful online content.				
23	Counseling services provided by social workers reduce the emotional impact of negative social content on students.				
24	Social workers collaborate with schools to promote digital literacy and positive online behavior among students.				
25	The intervention of social workers helps in reducing cases of cyberbullying and online peer pressure among students.				