

**Social Media Usage and Socioeconomic Status as Predictors of Sexual Engagement:  
Moderating role of Peer Influence among young Adult Students**

**Obasanjo S. ADEGBITE<sup>1</sup> . Richard A. ADU<sup>1</sup> . Sunday A. ATUNWA<sup>2</sup> . Raufu O.  
YUSUFF<sup>3</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria;*

*<sup>2</sup>Department of General Studies, Adeseun Ogundoyin Polytechnics, Eruwa, Nigeria.*

*<sup>3</sup>Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Emmanuel Alayande University of Education,  
Oyo, Nigeria.*

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**Abstract**

Sexual engagement is a sexual activity by undergraduate young adult students, which could be motivated by social media, socioeconomic status, and peer influence and exposes them to sexual and reproductive health challenges. Earlier studies tried to link social media to sexual behaviour but failed to explore the moderating role of peer influence on the link between social media usage and sexual engagement through a primary data source, while current study attempts to address this gap. A cross-sectional survey design was utilised, and participants were undergraduate university students aged 16-28 years who frequently used social media platforms. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to select participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds through G-power analysis at a confidence level of 95%, and 304 participants were recruited. Positive association was observed between social media usage and sexual engagement, while negative interconnection exists between socioeconomic status and sexual engagement. Peer influence significantly related to sexual engagement. Social media usage and socioeconomic status jointly influenced sexual engagement by explaining 42% variation on sexual engagement. Significant disparity was revealed between high and low social media usage on sexual engagement, and no moderating effect was observed. Institutions and associations should engaged in comprehensive media-literacy and sex education programmes that will focus on risks, benefits and effects of social media usage and sexual engagement.

**Keywords:** sexual engagement, social media, socioeconomic status, young adults.

Obasanjo S. Adegbite (*Corresponding author*)

[adegbiteobasanjo@gmail.com](mailto:adegbiteobasanjo@gmail.com)

+2348036906406.

Department of Psychology,  
Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

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## Introduction

The surface of social media has dramatically transformed communication and social interaction, particularly among young adults. This digital revolution coincides with significant developmental changes, including the exploration of sexuality (Maas, 2024). This study delves into the intricate interplay between social media usage, socioeconomic status, and sexual engagement among young adults, with a particular focus on the moderating role of peer influence. Various social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok, among others, have not only transformed communication but also paved the way for young adults to meet, form relationships, interact, mate, and engage in sexual activities. Social media serves as a major source of sexual content (Ashata, 2024), information, often influencing norms, attitudes, and behaviors related to sexuality (Regmi et al., 2022).

The digital era in the global world brought remarkable changes in how young adults relate and engage with people and the world around them through the use of social media. Social media usage has become the center of social interaction that offers exceptional access to social connections, information, and distinctive opinions and views on various topics, including sexuality. Social media plays a key role in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviors, and often, in most cases, serves as a primary source of sexual content and peer influences for young adults. However, the influence of social media is not homogeneous across young adults, as cited by Onasoga et al. (2020), and socioeconomic status plays a climacteric role in shaping individuals' access to social media and use of social media. It is presumed that young adults from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were commonly thought to have more access to digital devices, access to reliable internet connections, the ability to afford subscriptions for internet, and access to educational resources that may aid the use of social media (Njeri & Taym, 2024).

In contrast, young adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be entangled by insufficient access to the internet or an inability to access the internet, which may affect both the quantity and quality of their social media usage (Lenhart et al., 2015). This discrepancy can contribute to and explain the differences in how young adults from different socioeconomic backgrounds engage with sexuality and how they navigate sexual relationships. Furthermore, socioeconomic status is a crucial factor influencing sexual behavior. Gupta and Mahy's (2003) study showed that people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, including early sexual initiation and unprotected sex.

## Literature Review

Sexual behaviour, most especially among the youth, is influenced by a complex interplay of factors such as individual, social, environmental, and psychological factors, while social media, socioeconomic status (SES), and peer influence serve as contributors. According to Umanhonlen et al. (2023), social media usage was significantly found to predict sexual promiscuity among students in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study explained that exposure to sexual content on social media and peer relationship behaviour on social media platforms could shape students' sexual attitudes and behaviors. Most of the social media platforms serve as venues for social interaction among young adults, as well as beneficial opportunities for identity exploration and alliance formation. Moreover, social media users are also exposed to sexual content and peer behaviors that can influence sexual norms and behaviors. In a like manner, Escobar-Chaves et al. (2005) opined that exposure to sexual content on social media platforms is significantly associated with early sexual initiation and permissive sexual attitudes by adolescents.

Access to economic resources, education, and social networks, in turn, affects sexual behaviors. Lower socioeconomic status is empirically associated with limited access to sexual health education and higher engagement in risky sexual behaviors. For example, Umanhonlen et al. (2023) posited that socioeconomic status did not directly predict sexual promiscuity among students but interacted with other factors like peer influence and parenting styles to affect sexual behaviors. Their result suggested that socioeconomic status probably influences sexual engagement indirectly through its interaction with other social determinants.

Earlier studies have pointed to the crucial role of peer influence in shaping the sexual behaviors of adolescents. Kaufman-Parks et al. (2021) reported that having peers with permissive sexual attitudes was associated with increased engagement in casual sex among emerging adults, and a recent study conducted in Nigeria by Chigbu and Nwobi (2023) observed that peer influence was a significant predictor of sexual behavior, with students' interactions on social media platforms like Facebook and discussions with peers contributing to permissive sexual attitudes.

A study conducted by Omoponle and Veronica (2023) through a descriptive method among two hundred adolescents revealed a significant correlation between peer pressure and risky sexual behavior among in-school adolescents. The study further expressed that increased levels of peer pressure are associated with high engagement in risky sexual behaviors. The results that emanated from their study suggest that peer influence is pivotal to adolescents' sexual behaviors, and suggest intervention studies that will address peer dynamics in school settings to mitigate risky sexual practices.

Moreover, a recent similar study carried out by Olawade et al. (2024) through a narrative review to explore the realities of adolescent sexual behaviors in Nigeria, focused on how early adolescence and various social and environmental factors interfere with risky sexual behaviour. The narrative result shown that peer association plays an important role, influencing the sexual behaviors of in-school adolescents in Nigeria. It was further opined that adolescents are often driven towards early sexual experiences due to their interactions with peers, which can lead to risky sexual activities. The study highlighted early improper condom use, sexual debut, and multiple sexual partners as variables associated with their vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies.

Akude et al. (2024) measured sexual attitudes of one thousand and two hundred students through Brief Sexual Attitude Scale (BSAS). Their findings indicate weak positive inter-connectivity between peer sexual behaviour, sexual attitudes, and pressure to engage in sexual activity. Their finding suggests that peer influence does strongly impact sexual behaviours and recommends need for health initiatives in schools to promote safer sexual practices and reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents.

Another recent study (Idoko & Orakwue, 2023) used a cross-sectional design to assess factors affecting adolescents' risky sexual behavior. The study demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between peer influence and risky sexual behavior among adolescents who participated in the ENSACA/UNICEF ADOKITS Program. The findings denote that peer pressure strongly contributed to adolescents' engagement in high-risk sexual behaviors, and the findings accentuate the importance of addressing peer influence in health education and awareness programs to mitigate risky sexual behaviors.

Peçi (2017) attempted to influence peer pressure on adolescents' sexual behaviour and found that peer pressure significantly affects the sexual behavior of the sampled adolescents. The study highlighted that teens are more likely to engage in sexual activities if their peers exhibit permissive attitudes toward sex or are involved in risky behaviors like substance use. This suggests that in-school adolescents in Southeast Nigeria may also be influenced by similar dynamics, where

the behaviors and attitudes of their peers can lead to increased sexual initiation and potentially unprotected sex, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions.

Ajiboye (2023) through a descriptive survey method suggested a significant relationship between social media and high-risk sexual behaviour of students. This indicated that increased social media engagement predisposes students to risky sexual practices. Another study carried out by Langat and Kiptiony (2024) revealed that while social media impacted perceptions of sexual behavior, most students do engage in predisposition behaviors such as watching pornography or online dating that could make them vulnerable to sexual activities. Adebore et al. (2024) corroborated the earlier findings when the study opined that 60% of undergraduates were exposed to sexual risks via social media, with significant associations between socio-demographic variables and sexual practices. Online dating and viewing porn were prevalent risky behaviors linked to social media usage among students. The study utilised a cross-sectional design and sampled four hundred undergraduate students.

## **Theoretical Background and Development of Hypotheses**

### ***Social Media and sexuality engagement***

The current research is grounded primarily in the ecological systems theory (EST) as developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The theoretical framework is based on five environmental postulates that have significant impact and interaction with human behavior. The ecological systems theory argues that human behaviors are influenced by dynamic interactions between individuals and their immediate environments. The fourth ecological determinant of behavior was labelled the chronosystem, and it was described as environmental time-based changes, e.g., technological advancement, and life transitions throughout the lifespan. Sexual behavior may alter over time as a result of greater exposure to sexualized social media contents which Bronfenbrenner called chronosystem influencer of behaviour. The emergency and use of internet, smartphones, and social media are chronosystem interaction that could impact involvement in sexual engagement of young adults.

Earlier studies indicated that social media can both positively and negatively influence sexual relationships. For example, Brown and L'Engle (2009) and Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2012) affirm that exposure to sexual contents on platforms such as Instagram or Snapchat has been linked to increased sexual activity and more permissive sexual attitudes. In this digital age, social media is a powerful force influencing nearly all aspects of young adults' lives, including their sexual behaviors and attitudes. This ease of access to information, the ability to connect with peers, and the exposure to diverse perspectives on sexuality have reshaped how young adults navigate sexual engagement.

Nnebue et al. (2022) study determined that there were high correlations between social media use and sexual conduct among undergraduate students, for example, gender disparities, sexual activity, sexual behaviors engaged in, and sexual partners, and referencing social media's influence on risky sexual behavior. Kesehatan et al. (2024) believed that social media usage influences adolescent positive and negative sexual behavior because it provides easy access to sex information and sex material and vice versa, and it encourages sexual behaviors. Ajiboye (2023) added that excessive social media usage is positively related to risky sexual behavior in the form of unprotected sex and numerous sexual partners, and more social media usage can expose students to unhealthy sexual practices.

Research has persistently established the influence of social media on sexual attitudes and behaviors (Garbner et al., 1986). Exposure to sexual content on social media, according to Anderson et al. (2020), has been linked to sexual initiation, increased sexual risk-taking, and objectification of women. These could make young adults vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health challenges such as sexually transmitted infections, prostate issues, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and exposure to cervical cancer.

H<sub>1</sub>. Social media usage would positively and significantly correlate with sexual engagement among young adult students.

### ***Peer Influence and Sexual engagement***

The first ecological system that influences our interaction and behaviours according to Bronfenbrenner is referred to as the microsystem. This is regarded as the immediate ecological context which considerable influence on behaviours. The microsystem ecology according to Bronfenbrenner involves direct interaction with other significant people within our immediate environment, such as family members, peer groups, friends, schools, and interactions through social media networks. Interaction with peers among young adults could greatly influence young adult sexual engagement. Peer group can provide models for sexual behavior, create normative pressures, and offer social rewards for conforming to group norms.

In a study carried out by Lyons et al. (2015), it was found that young adults' perceptions of their peers' sexual behaviors significantly influenced their sexual conformity. Udoh and Ekott (2014) stressed that students in public university have tendency of persuasive influence on sexuality. Peers have a compelling influence on the sexuality of adolescent students in public universities as highlighted in the study. In Kingori (2014) study, peer influence has great impact on the sexual behaviors of adolescents, promoting risky behaviors like premarital sex. The research identified that a greater percentage of students were involved in sexual activities because of peer pressure, indicating the necessity for proper reproductive health education among peers.

The importance of peer influence as a relationship-moderating mechanism between social media usage and sexual behavior is often understudied. There remain significant gaps in understanding the complex interplay between social media usage, socioeconomic status (SES), and sexual behaviors. Most existing studies have focused on the direct effects of social media exposure on sexual attitudes and behaviors, often neglecting how peer influence moderates these effects. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how social media usage interacts with socioeconomic status to shape sexual engagement in the context of socioeconomic disparities and the moderating effect of peer influence.

According to Hor et al. (2022), adolescents who perceived their peers to be sexually active are more likely to be sexually active themselves. Peer influence was said to be higher among male teenagers compared to female teenagers, with a gender focus. Peer influence is linked with risky sex (Husniya et al., 2023), while Najdowski & Cleary (2023) established that peer influence considerably affects the sexual behavior of adolescents, and those who believe that peers support sex will have sex. Favorable peer attitudes towards sex also result in higher engagement in behaviors like forcible touching. Peer pressure significantly affects adolescent sexual activity, (Banyard et al., 2021) because peers can both promote risky behavior, i.e., drug use and violence, and prevention-prosocial attitudes, i.e., bystander intervention against sexual violence, showing the influence of peer groups over such behaviors.

H<sub>2</sub>. Peer influence would be positively and be associated with sexual engagement among young adult students.

### *Socioeconomic status and Sexual engagement*

The third environmental element that influences sexual behaviour was tagged exosystem in ecology system theory. This system has an indirect impact on young adults' sexual activities, and it entails parents' work policies, socioeconomic status, media content control, community safety and financial policies. Parents' occupational and socioeconomic status are parts of the exosystem, which can determine the level of social media exposure to information and likely support sexual engagements among young adults.

Students who easily afford access to economic resources, and social networks are much more on sexual behaviour (Anguzu et al., 2019). Lower socioeconomic status is empirically associated with limited access to sexual health education and higher engagement in risky sexual behaviors. For example, Umanhonlen et al. (2023) posited that socioeconomic status did not directly predict sexual promiscuity among students but interacted with other factors like peer influence and parenting styles to influence sexual behaviour. Their result suggested that socioeconomic status probably influences sexual engagement indirectly through its interaction with other social determinants.

Higgins et al. (2022) evidence indicates that individuals with socioeconomic limited situations experienced poorer sexual health, i.e., lower satisfaction and functioning. This necessitates the consideration of socioeconomic factors as structural mechanisms that impact sexual lives. Socioeconomic status has a positive influence on sexual behavior among Nigerian youth. Work status, wealth index, and education level correlate with risky sexual behavior (Okunlola et al., 2020), e.g., unprotected sex and the lifetime number of sexual partners. Devi et al.'s (2024) research established that adolescents' socio-economic status significantly influences their knowledge about STDs and thereby their sexual behavior. Increased awareness translates to increased safe sexual practices, suggesting that socio-economic-based interventions in education are critical. Adolescents from higher socioeconomic levels showed greater improvement in knowledge. Level of education and occupation of the head of the family influenced adolescents' STD knowledge. Economic disadvantage, particularly greater poverty, is positively and strongly associated with risky sexual behavior (RSB) in adolescents and young adults (Bae et al., 2022), manifesting as early sexual debut, condom nonuse, and multiple sex partners, and this indicates the impact of socioeconomic status on sexual behavior.

Anguzu et al. (2019) article states that socioeconomic status affects sexually transmitted infection (STI) risk, where middle wealth quintiles have elevated risk, and higher socioeconomic status is protective. Socioeconomic status has an inverse relationship with STI risk in Uganda. This relationship is further complicated by factors such as disposable income and having multiple sexual partners. Cha (2022) points out significant associations between socioeconomic status (SES) and sexual self-efficacy, such that those with more favourable past, current, and expected future socioeconomic status have greater sexual self-efficacy as they emerge into adulthood, thus pointing to the applicability of life course theories. The construct of sexual self-efficacy is tied to historical, current, and prospective socioeconomic status.

H<sub>3</sub>. Socioeconomic status would significantly relate to sexual engagement among young adult students.

### *High and low social media usage and sexual engagement*

High social media use among Black MSM is linked with higher overall sexual risk behaviors, (Broaddus et al., 2015) including a greater number of sexual partners and more frequent

unprotected anal intercourse (UAI), than low social media use, which is linked to fewer risky behaviors.

Yoders et al.(2022) research illustrated that high social media users for atleast four hours plus use per day were found to be significantly more likely to have sex compared to low users, reflecting an association between greater social media use and more frequent high-risk sexual behaviors among adolescents. Mahoney (2016) research shows that students with high social media use report risk sexual behaviors, including multiple anonymous partners and forgoing safe-sex practices, than those with low use, who might have more guarded sexual health behaviors. It was emphasized that fourty four percent of the respondents had sexual encounters result from social media applications.

Persistent use of social media has also been linked with increased exposure to pornographic content (Gonçalves, 2024), which have the greatest impact on the sex life of adolescents. It was found that as teenagers become increasingly exposed to sexual experience and knowledge on social media, they are likely to emulate similar behavior, and thus there is increased likelihood of indulging in unhealthy sex. This exposure is to a heightened promiscuity among adolescents, the cause for which demands guarding and social media literacy.

H4. Significant differences would be observed between young adult students with high and low social media usage on sexual engagement.

H5. Social media usage, socioeconomic status, and peer influence will jointly and independently predict sexual engagement among young adult students.

### ***Peer influence as a moderator***

Bronfenbrenner's theory was more conceptual than predictive, too broad and descriptive, lacked specificity, and under-emphasis on biological factors. Despite all the criticism, some relevant hypotheses can be derived from the theory: Undergraduate students from supportive microsystems (e.g., positive peer groups) may engaged lesser on sexual behaviour; Socioeconomic status in the context of exosystem can moderate the relationship between social media usage and sexual behaviour, with lower socioeconomic status being associated with lower vulnerability to social media and sexual engagement.

Peer acceptance of early sexual behaviour moderates adolescents' sexual behaviour risk (Oudekerk et al., 2014), especially in the context of high maternal psychological control. This interaction effect demonstrates the enduring impact of parenting boundaries on behaviour. While peers may encourage engagement in risk behaviours, the extent to which parents exercise control can either amplify or provide protection from, the risk. Ching et al. (2024) indicated that perceived peer attitudes strongly moderate adolescent attitudes towards postponing sexual intercourse as well as condom usage. This study demonstrates the influence of peer attitudes on self-efficacy, highlighting the need to consider peer influence when addressing adolescent sexual health issues.

In the study by Choukas-Bradley et al. (2014) demonstrated that peer influence susceptibility acts as a moderator on adolescents' perceptions of popular peers' sexual behavior and their sexual behaviour was trajectories. Strong susceptibility alongside with high perceptions of peers' sexual partners leads to steeper increases in adolescents' sexual partners over time. Young adults who hold a strong believe that their peers accepted casual sex were more likely have enhanced sexual intentions and behaviours.

H6. Peer influence would be significantly moderate the relationship between social media usage and sexual engagement, such that low peer influence will decrease the influence of social media usage on sexual engagement.

## Method

### *Participants*

The targeted participants for this study included young university undergraduate adults aged between 18 and 30 years who actively and frequently use social media platforms. The rationale behind the choice of this age range group is that it represents a group with high social media usage and a critical period of sexual identity formation. Participants for this study were recruited from online advertisements through social media and university platforms, such as university mailing lists and faculty and departmental platforms. To ensure a thorough representation sampling, individuals from both urban and rural areas will be included. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select participants for this study. These techniques were used to ensure the inclusion of participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds (low, middle, and high), and participants' socioeconomic status was categorized based on parental income, educational background, and occupational status. To arrive at an adequate sample size, GPower software was utilized for power analysis, and the estimated sample size for the study is approximately three hundred and four (304) undergraduate students with a confidence level of 95% to account for missing data and non-responses from participants. The rationale behind the choice of this age cohort group is that it represents a group with high social media usage and critical age periods of sexual identity formation.

### *Instruments*

The questionnaire was the basic instrument used to elicit data from participants. Section A of the questionnaire measures participants' social media usage through a perceived social media usage integration scale (SMUIS) developed by Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson (2013). The scale assesses three dimensions of social media usage, such as frequency of use of social media, duration of usage, and types of social media platforms used. Items on the scale include questions such as "How often do you use social media to interact with peers?" while responses to the items are rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 = Never and 5 = Often. Section B measures participants' socioeconomic status (SES), generating responses on participants' educational level, family income, and parental occupational status, categorized into high, medium, and low socioeconomic status.

Section C of the instrument assesses information on participants' sexual engagement measured through the Sexual Behaviour Questionnaire (SBQ) adapted from Bon, Hittner, & Lawandales (2001). The scale has 21 items assessing the frequency of sexual encounters, types of sexual behaviors, and sexual decision-making processes. The items on the scale include "How often have you engaged in sexual activity in the past year?" and "I engage in sexual activity more than once every two months." Response format is rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Often).

Section D of the instrument measures participants' peer influence through the Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) developed by Brown et al. (1986). The scale assesses perceived pressure from peers regarding sexual behaviors and social conformity. It has 10 items with response formats on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Often, and has statements such as "My peers encourage me to engage in sexual activities. The control variables, such as gender, educational background, and relationship status, were included to account for any additional influences on sexual engagement.



### ***Procedure***

Data for this study were collected through online administration of a questionnaire via Google forms from three hundred and four sampled students from two campuses of Osun state university, Osogbo campus and Okuku campus. Seventy six participants were recruited from each of the following faculties: science, engineering, social sciences and and management science through their faculty platforms. The aims and objectives of this research work was discussed with participants and included in the front page of the instrument. They were asked to supply options to the items as applicable to them and confidentiality of their responses were assured. Information detailed to their personal privacy such as names and date of birth were excluded to secure their privacy. The instrument is accompanied by a consent form, which were filled out before filling out the questionnaire, and it took approximately 20 to 40 minutes to complete.

### ***Design/Statistics***

The current study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design and our data were analyzed with the Descriptive statistics and hierarchical regression analysis using the SPSS software version 26.

### **Results**

**Table 1:** Correlation Matrix Analysis of the Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	Skewness	Kurtosis
SEXENG	38.18	15.86	304	1					.54	-.69
SOCMEU	46.20	13.33	304	.64***	1				.01	-.36
PEERINF	22.55	10.06	304	.56***	.62***	1			.70	.04
SES	2.12	.53	304	-.11***	-.07	-.01	1		.16	.53
Age	1.24	.45	304	.27***	.20***	.19***	-.04	1	1.43	.65

\*\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.000 level (2-tailed)

Note: SEXENG = Sexual engagement. SOCMEU = Social Media Usage. PEERINF = Peer Influence. SES = Socioeconomic Status.

In order to investigate hypothesis one, which stated that a significant positive correlation would exist between social media usage and sexual engagement. A correlation matrix was computed, and the result revealed a significant interconnection between social media usage and sexuality engagement among young adult undergraduate students ( $r = .64^{***}$ ,  $N = 304$ ,  $P < .001$ ). The direction of the relationship observed was positive, which implies that young adult students with high social media usage are very likely to be high on sexual engagement. Otherwise, young adult students with low social media usage are very likely to be low on sexual engagement. An increase in social media usage by young adult students may potentially increase the likelihood of sexual engagement among young adult students. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

The table above also revealed a significant interconnection between socioeconomic status and sexual engagement among young adult students ( $r = -.11^{***}$ ,  $N = 304$ ,  $P < .001$ ). The direction of the relationship was observed to be negative, as revealed in the table above. Therefore, this means that high socioeconomic status reduces involvement in sexual engagement, or better put,

## Social Media Use and Socioeconomic Status in Sexual Engagement

the higher the socioeconomic status, the lower the sexual engagement among young adult students. The result explained that young adult students with low socioeconomic status are likely to engage more in sexual behaviour compared to young adult students with high socioeconomic status. This result may explain the reason why some students with low socioeconomic status engaged in sexual behaviour for money-making, most especially during this hard economic time; therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Table 1 above shows a significant positive association between peer influence and sexual engagement ( $r = .56^{***}$ ,  $N = 304$ ,  $P < .001$ ). The direction of the relationship was positive, and the result implies that an increase in peer influence may lead to an increase in sexual engagement. Young adult students with high peer influence or who easily subscribe to peer influence will likely be high on sexual engagement; therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

**Table 2: Independent t-test shows differences in sexual engagement**

Sexual Engagement	Social Media Usage	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
	Low	98	28.60	10.74	-7.97	302	.000
	High	206	42.73	15.90			

The result of the independent t-test above shows a significant disparity between young adult students with low and high social media usage on sexual engagement [ $t = (2, 302) 7.94$ ,  $P < .001$ ]. The output of the analysis through an independent t-test shows that young adult students with high social media usage significantly score high ( $\bar{x} = 42.73$ ) on sexual engagement compared to young adult students with low social media usage ( $\bar{x} = 28.60$ ). This result implies that young adult students with high social media usage are more significantly involved in sexual engagement than young adult students with low social media usage; therefore, the hypothesis that young adult students with high and low social media usage are different in sexual engagement is hereby accepted.

**Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Result**

	Sexual Engagement		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Social Media Usage	.64**	.48**	.48**
Socioeconomic Status	-.07	-.08	-.08
Peer Influence		.26**	.26**
Social Media * Peer Influence			-.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.417**	.460**	.460
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.417**	.042**	.000
ΔF	107.834**	23.386**	.001

Note: \*\*Significant at  $<.001$

In the first model of the hierarchical regression analysis performed in this study, the authors tested for the joint and independent effects of social media usage and socioeconomic status on sexual engagement among young adult students. Model 1 results show a significant joint effect of

social media usage and socioeconomic status on sexual engagement ( $\beta=0.64$ ), explaining 42% ( $R^2 = 0.417$ ) variation in sexual engagement. In model 2, the authors tested for the effect of peer influence on sexual engagement among young adult students. The result of the second model reveals a significant effect of peer influence on sexual engagement ( $\beta = 0.26$ ), explaining an additional 4% change in sexual engagement. Therefore, social media usage and peer influence significantly have an impact by contributing to the changes in sexual engagement, and the hypothesis is hereby accepted. In model 3 of the hierarchical regression analysis, we tested for the moderation role of peer influence on the relationship between social media usage and sexual engagement. The Z-scores for both social media usage and peer influence were calculated, and the interaction of social media usage and peer influence was added in Model 3 to determine the moderation effect. Results from model 3 show that there is no significant interaction effect of social media usage and peer influence on sexual engagement ( $\beta = -0.001$ ) and revealed no significant changes in sexual engagement compared to model 2. Therefore, peer influence does not moderate the relationship between social media usage and sexual engagement. The hypothesis was therefore rejected.

## Discussion

This study investigated the impact of social media usage and socioeconomic status on sexual engagement and the moderating role of peer influence among young adult students. Discussion will be done in line with the descriptive characteristics of the participants and according to the formulated hypotheses. The descriptive characteristics of the participants from the table above show that there are more female participants than male participants. This result must have been influenced by the notion that female students are the recipients of sexual stigmatization. The study also revealed that the majority of the participants fall between the ages of sixteen and twenty. This result must have been influenced by seeing themselves as sexually active. Moreover, the majority of the participants are from a medium socioeconomic background, which means they are the category of students who see themselves having access to basic things that support their education.

Hypothesis one stated that social media usage will positively and significantly correlate with sexual engagement among young adult students. A significant positive relationship was observed between social media usage and sexual engagement among young adult students. The positive relationship observed indicates that an increase in social media usage increases sexual engagement among young adult students. It can be further explained that the more involvement of young adult students in social media usage, the greater the vulnerability to creating more relationships that could lead to sexual engagement. In other words, it can be explained that young adult students with high social media usage are probably high on sexual engagement. The current result supported the earlier findings of Ajiboye (2023); Langat and Kiptiony, (2024), and Umanhonlen, (2023) who suggested that social media play a major role in shaping sexual engagement.

The second hypothesis divulges a meaningful association between socioeconomic status and sexual engagements among young adult students. The direction of the relationship observed between socioeconomic status and sexual engagement is negative, as revealed in the table above. This can be explained as high socioeconomic status reduces involvement in sexual engagement, or better put, the higher the socioeconomic status, the lower the sexual engagement among young adult students. It is further explained that young adult students with low socioeconomic status are more likely to engage in higher sexual behaviour compared to young adult students with high socioeconomic status. Therefore, this result may explain the reason why some students with low

socioeconomic status engaged in sexual behaviour for money-making, material benefits, and finances, most especially during this hard economic period. The findings of the current results were in line with Njeri and Taym (2024), who suggested a significant relationship between parental socioeconomic status and sexual relationships. Furthermore, the result corroborates the finding of Woolley and Macinko (2019) that socioeconomic status influences risky sexual behaviours among undergraduate students, as financial hardship can lead to practices like prostitution. Another study from Kenya supported the current finding (Langat et al., 2020) that undergraduate students from lower SES backgrounds reported higher instances of risky sexual behaviors. Research in Nigeria supports the findings of the current research when it theorized that 31.5% of young females aged 15-24 had already had sexual intercourse, with determinants of socioeconomic factors linked to early initiation (Isiugo-Abanihe & Oyediran, 2004).

Hypothesis three tested for a positive association between peer influence and sexual engagement among young adult students. The result shows a significant positive association between peer influence and sexual engagement, as revealed in the table above. A positive relationship was observed, and this implies that conformity with peer pressure may likely increase sexual engagement among young adult students. Young adult students often take advice from their peers and fall to peer pressure when friends talk about their sexual experiences, which could make them feel like engaging in sexual activities. Young adult students with higher peer influence or who easily subscribe to peer pressure are likely to be higher on sexual engagement. The findings of this study corroborate the study of Peçi (2017), who affirms that adolescents are more likely to engage in sexual activities if they perceive their peers as having permissive attitudes towards sex and childbearing. Moore, so the finding also supported the suggestion of Suleiman and Dearnorff (2015) that peer influence significantly affects adolescent sexual behavior, with friends and romantic partners shaping decisions through both explicit pressure and subtle cues. This influence can lead to earlier sexual debut, increased activity, and varying attitudes towards sexual relationships among adolescents.

Hypothesis four tested for a significant difference between young adult students with high and low social media usage on sexual engagement through an independent t-test. A significant disparity between young adult students with low and high social media usage on sexual engagement was observed. It was revealed that young adult students with high social media usage are significantly more sexually active compared to young adult students with low social media usage. This output means that young adult students with high social media usage are significantly more engaged in sexuality, while young adult students with low social media usage are less involved in sexual engagement. The possible reason for these differences could be that social media is a platform for social interaction, which paves the way for easy friendship and relationship formation. Students with high social media usage will have the opportunity to meet different people on social media, and a sexual relationship can easily be formed on social media. The current result corroborates the findings of Kesehatan et al. (2024), who opined that high social media usage can lead to increased exposure to sexual content, encouraging risky sexual behavior among adolescents. Conversely, low usage may limit such exposure, but it can also reduce access to valuable sexual education resources that promote safe practices. Also, the result complements findings of a Nigerian study by Ajiboye (2023) that high social media usage is associated with risky sexual behaviors.

Hypothesis five purported that social media usage, socioeconomic status, and peer influence will jointly and independently predict sexual engagement among young adult students. The hypothesis was tested through a hierarchical regression model, and the result revealed a

significant joint effect of social media usage and socioeconomic status on sexual engagement by explaining significant changes in sexual engagement. Moreover, social media usage, socioeconomic status, and peer influence jointly and independently predict sexual engagement among young adults. The findings of the current study corroborate the suggestion of Ashata (2024) that social media usage significantly influences adolescents' sexual behavior, often leading to increased risky behaviors. Socioeconomic status and peer influence further exacerbate these effects, as adolescents navigate relationships and sexuality through the lens of social media interactions and peer dynamics.

Hypothesis six tested for the moderating effect of peer influence on the relationship between social media usage and sexual engagement in such a way that low peer influence will decrease the impact of social media usage on sexual engagement among young adult students. The result of the tested hypothesis does not reveal any significant moderation effect of peer influence on the relationship between social media usage and sexual engagement. The finding corroborates with Choukas-Bradley et al. (2014), who purported that adolescents who perceive high levels of sexual activity among their peers are more likely to engage in similar behaviors, particularly when they are susceptible to peer influence.

### ***Implications of the study***

Findings of this study will contribute to an open understanding of how social media usage affects sexual engagement. More so, how young adult students from different low, middle, and high socioeconomic statuses influence sexual engagement and how peer influence moderates these relationships. The results could inform interventions that target peer dynamics to reduce risky sexual behaviors and promote healthier social media habits among young adults.

### ***Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research***

The first noticeable limitation in this study was the cross-sectional design used, which limited the ability of this work to establishing a causative relationship. Future experimental and longitudinal research work can be conducted to establish strong causative evidence. Secondly, data were generated through self-reported responses, which pave the way for social bias, especially on sexual engagement. Although steps were taken to ensure anonymity and encourage honesty in the participants' responses. In addition, the result of this study may not be fully generalised to all young adults, because the sample size was recruited online; therefore, more studies are needed to establish a causative effect of social media, socioeconomic status, and peer influence on sexual engagement. More so, future researchers may venture into mediating role of peer influence on sexual engagement.

### ***Conclusion***

The methodology adopted in this study delineates a comprehensive approach for investigating the impact of social media usage and socioeconomic status on sexual engagement while assessing the moderating role of peer influence. This work uses a combination of descriptive, correlational, and moderation analyses. The study aims to offer insights into how peer influence impacted the relationship between social media usage, socioeconomic background, and sexual behavior among young adult students. This study investigated the impact of social media usage and socioeconomic status on sexual engagement and the moderating role of peer influence among young adult students. The results show that social media usage, socioeconomic status, and peer influence are associated with sexual engagement among young adult students. Moreover, it was discovered that social media usage, socioeconomic status, and peer influence predicted sexual

engagement; peer influence did not moderate the influence of social media usage on sexual engagement by way of their interaction.

In line with the findings, this study recommends that policy formulators and educational institutions should organize comprehensive sex education programs that will focus on extensive discussion of the risks and benefits associated with social media usage. The education programmes should also focus on how socioeconomic status shapes sexual engagement and the role of peer influence on sexual behaviors. Critical media education that will teach young adults how to recognize and challenge unrealistic sexual behavior and relationships in social media content and develop media literacy through symposiums, workshops, seminars, and dedicated courses is recommended.

A peer mentoring programme in which more experienced or older adult students can guide younger ones about the positive usage of social media and sexual health decisions is recommended. Educators and psychologists can organise a students' awareness week programme on healthy relationships and potential risks of social media usage regarding the perspective of their body image, peer pressure, and sexual behaviour. Parents and guardians are encouraged to be more involved in their children's social media usage and to educate them on the potential impacts of social media on sexual engagement. This can involve open communication about online safety, responsible media consumption, and sexual health. Parents are also expected to build strong emotional and social skills that can reduce the vulnerability to peer pressure. These social skills may include fostering a healthy self-esteem and encouraging a positive sense of identity that isn't reliant on social media validation. Considering these recommendations, future research work and intervention studies could be more effective in addressing the complex interplay of social media, socioeconomic status, peer influence, and sexual engagement among young adult students.

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