

# New Media and Adolescents' Sexual Behaviour in Sub-Sahara Africa: Linking Theories to Realities

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## Abstract

Like the rest of the world, the new media are aiding and promoting speedy and easy access to information among adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), especially those in the urban centers who are of middle and upper class categorization. However, the new media are equally avenues for African adolescents to learn and develop antisocial behaviors. This article tries to interrogate the interconnectedness between the new media and adolescents' sexual behavior in SSA, especially those in the middle and upper class background, by linking theories to realities. The theoretical assumptions of *generational cohort theory* (GCT), *social learning theory* (SLT), and *uses and gratification theory* (U&G) provide a good understanding of this connection. For instance, GCT would posit that the new generation of adolescents are born into a technological-driven society where the new media trend. SLT explains the connection from social psychological perspective and posits that learning, including sexual behavior, whether online or in the real world, is not purely behavioral, rather a cognitive process that takes place in a social context. U&G submits that new media are widely used by young people to achieve certain desires which may include cognitive, affective, personal integrated, social integrity, and tension-related needs. The article concludes that a single model analysis is not enough to understand the interconnectedness between the new media and adolescents' sexual behavior in SSA. It rather suggests a theoretical pluralism. Effective parent–child communication regarding reproductive health matters, including sex and relationship education (SRE), in the school curriculum and homes are recommended.

## Keywords

sexuality, religious studies, humanities, adolescents, new media, communication technologies, mass communication, communication, social sciences, reproductive health risk, Africa, area studies

## Introduction

The new media are Internet-based applications that are accessible through smart phones and devices. They include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, blogs, YouTube, snapchat, and MySpace (see Lindsay, 2011). It is an undisputable fact that these applications are changing virtually everything now more than ever before; how we do business, transact, or market products, and how we interact and make friends with immediate and far away people have all changed drastically in the recent time. The same way access to information for personal and social development is also changing very quickly. In fact, the world is connected more than ever before. Previous stumbling blocks to international businesses, governance, and transportation are being uprooted by the juggernaut of globalization. The revolution in the telecommunication sector has therefore increased Internet access and use among the general population, particularly young people.

However, the active involvement of young people in global online communities has become a source of concern for

researchers and policy makers, as young people spend more time online than in the real world. They spend more time on the Internet and make friends easier online than in the real world. This is the global trend. For example, in the United States, reports have shown that adolescents spend more time engaging with the social media than with their parents and schools (Brown, 2008) to the extent that parents and school administrators are now concerned about how social media interfere with learning, literacy, and adolescents' social and sexual development (Ito et al., 2009). More worrisome to most parents and school administrators in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) urban centers is that the Internet-based applications are

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promoting individuality and secrecy and exposing adolescents to sexually explicit materials (SEMs) (Akinwale, 2010). In Nigeria, some studies have found that sexually positioned websites are among the most widely visited by adolescents (Abdullahi, Adekeye, Mahmoud, & Akor, 2013; Akinwale, 2009; Asekun-Olarinmoye, Asekun-Olarinmoye, Adebimpe, & Omisore, 2014; Igbo, EgbeOkpenge, & Awopetu, 2012; Kunnuyi, 2011). In Ethiopia, a study among preparatory school adolescents reported that more than 77% of the students knew about the presence of SEM and most of them (75.5%) had watched SEM films/movies while more than 73% were exposed to sex explicit (SE) texts (Habesha, Aderaw, & Lakew, 2015). Another study in Kenya discovered that Internet has increased access to sexually explicit music, sex images and videos, and sex texting. The study also found that social network service (SNS) has increased online sex solicitation among the students. The study concluded that there is a connection between access to social media and high prevalence of teenage pregnancy among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in high schools in the study area (Kimemia & Mugambi, 2016).

Consequent upon this development, there has been a widespread reservation for Internet-based applications by most parents and school administrators in SSA, largely, owing to lack of security of adolescents in these applications. It is not uncommon for young women across the continent to be deceived by online fraudsters who create fake identities to lure them into deceitful relationships that can lead to untimely and early death. The case of the late Cynthia Osokogwu, who met her “friends” on Facebook and subsequently gang-raped and killed in 2012 having traveled from Jos to Lagos, remains a reference point in Nigeria. The news became public after her murder. The killers have since been sentenced to death. Also, the case of Miss Elizabeth John Adie, who was also gang-raped and killed in February 2014 by a group of men she met online, remains fresh in the memories of most Nigerians who heard and read the horrific story in national dailies. Therefore, the alarming rate of criminal activities associated with the new media and the trending of romantic and exotic dances has spurred researchers to begin to interrogate their connection. However, few theoretical frameworks exist in reproductive health studies in SSA to understudy this trending phenomenon. It is in view of this that this article locates relevant theories in the literature to understand increasing demand for new media among adolescents in Africa, especially those in the urban centers and of middle and upper class categorization. This is done within the context of relevant psychosociological theories.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### *What Are New Media?*

Distinction is often drawn between traditional or “old” media and the “new media.” Unlike traditional media that include mainly of newspapers, radio, and television, the new media are a phenomenon that changes frequently as it continuously

evolves. The distinguishable factor of new media from traditional media is the digitalization of content. New media do not include television programs, feature films, magazines, books, or paper-based publications unless they comprise technologies that enable digital interactivity. New media have been defined in distinctive ways. For Socha and Eberschmid (2014), new media are a 21st-century terminology that is related to the Internet and the interplay between technology, images, and sound. According to them, new media are Internet-based applications that combine Internet accessible digital text, images, and video with web-links, creative participation of contributors, and interactive feedback of users as well as the formation of an online community of members (Bailey & Barbara, 2014). According to Ito et al. (2009), the term new media is used “to describe a media ecology where more traditional media such as books, television, and radio are intersecting with digital media” (p. vx). They specifically include interactive media, online networks, and media for social communication.

### *Who Is an Adolescent?*

People confuse adolescence with other concepts such as “teenagers,” “youngsters,” and “youth.” Some use these concepts interchangeably. These concepts seem similar but they are not the same when defined chronologically, physiologically, and psychologically. Adolescent stage is usually defined as the stage of puberty, a transitional period between puberty and adulthood in human development, extending mainly over the teen years and terminating legally when the age of maturity is reached. Adolescence represents an important phase in psychosexual and psychosocial development. At this stage, young people are faced with various bio-psycho-social changes, including developing a system of values, such as sexual values (Abdullahi et al., 2013). Most researchers have relied on the definition of adolescence based on the observations of multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). For many of these organizations, adolescence is usually seen as a period in human development between childhood and adulthood and represents one of the critical transitions in a life span and is usually characterized by a tremendous pace in growth and change that is second to infancy ([www.grin.com/document/210499](http://www.grin.com/document/210499)).

Certain physical, physiological, and psychological experiences and characteristics are usually attributed to adolescence. Besides physical and sexual maturation, these experiences include movement toward social and economic independence, identity formation, the acquisition of skills necessary to carry out adult relationships and roles, and the capacity for self-thought (Brown, 2008). These features are usually universal among adolescents, except in rare occasions. However, the duration and defining characteristics of this period may vary across time, cultures, and socioeconomic circumstances (Shonde, 2010; WHO, 2015). Therefore, while adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and potential, it is also a time of considerable risk during

which social contexts such as new media exert powerful influence on character building which may result in changing attitudes and behaviors for most adolescents. According to Brown (2008) and Carroll and Kirkpatrick (2011), adolescents in contemporary society usually look to new media for sexual information and advice in a critical developmental period, and this has been reported to have eroded the norms and expectations of sexual behavior that have historically been the primary function of the family. Chronologically, “adolescents” are people between the ages of 10 and 19; “young people” are those between 10 and 24 years while “youth” are those between 15 and 24 years (WHO, 1989). “Adolescents” and “young people” are, however, used interchangeably in this article.

### **New Media and Adolescents’ Sexual Behavior: A Review of the Literature**

The revolution in information, communication, and technology (ICT) and the waves of globalization have ushered in a new society widely regarded as information age (also known as the new media age or digital age), which has greatly impacted the world socially and economically. Like developed economies, ICT and globalization have triggered economic growth and development in most developing countries, especially at macro levels. For instance, a macro-level econometric analysis of developing countries by the World Bank in 2009 found that a 10% increase in broadband and a 10% increase in wire line Internet penetration created 1.38% and 1.12% increase in GDP growth (Guerriero, 2015). As members of the global community, Sub-Saharan African countries have benefited immensely from the ICT as access to mobile network coverage has grown exponentially. According to a World Bank report, mobile network coverage in Africa rose from paltry 16% to a staggering 90% between 1990s and year 2000s (Guerriero, 2015). Increase in mobile network notwithstanding, about 700 million people still do not have access to mobile Internet services in SSA (Adepetu, 2017) suggesting that access to the Internet in this part of the world is still very poor, especially among the rural populace.

All over the world, research has found that adolescents are the most users of the Internet. SSA is not an exception. This is because adolescents are smarter, more creative, and flexible when it comes to digitalization (Consalvo & Ess, 2011). Indeed, the majority of the 420 million Internet service users in SSA are adolescents (Adepetu, 2017). Specifically, a newspaper report in Nigeria indicates that the majority of the 83 million Internet users are adolescents and many use the new media in multi-folds (The Nigeria Communications Commission [NCC], 2015) whereas the majority of the older generations are still struggling to catch up with the growing trends in mobile and Internet usage in SSA. However, it must be emphasized that not all adolescents in SSA have equal access to mobile phones and the

Internet. The majority of mobile phone users and the Internet in SSA reside in urban centers and are of middle and upper class backgrounds. For these young people, the new media provide unlimited opportunities in terms of access to and dissemination of sociopolitical information necessary for personal and societal development. The new media are also important avenues for political conscientization for many young people. For instance, like the Egypt uprising, the social media played a significant role in the 2012 protests against the increase in pump price in January by the Jonathan Administration in Nigeria. *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and other applications provided the platforms for mass mobilization during the agitations and protests (Ibrahim, 2013). Apart from aiding quick access to and dissemination of information as well as political conscientization, the new media are means of communicating with friends and family members for most African adolescents in urban centers.

However, apart from the positive impacts of social media on the adolescents’ personal development, the new media could also instill antisocial behavior and this is becoming a thing of concern to researchers, parents, and policy makers. Studies all over the world have shown that the new media are exposing adolescents to SEMs and this is fast changing sexual activities and orientations among the adolescents with potential danger on reproductive health risks. For instance, in the United States, 93% of males and 62% of females are exposed to online pornographic materials prior to the age of 18 (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). Ybarra and Mitchell (2005) discovered that out of 1,500 adolescents studied, more than 20% reported exposure to SEM and about half of the respondents sought pornography through telephone sex lines. Exposure to online pornographic materials has an impact on sexual behavior of the adolescents. Studies have found that adolescents that are exposed to online, uncensored pornographic materials are more likely to report permissive sexual attitudes (e.g., acceptance of casual or premarital sex) and to have oral virginal sex than adolescents with less exposure to those materials (Brown & Engle, 2009).

Equally, exposure to Internet pornography is related to entertaining multiple sex partners and the use of alcohol and drugs (Braun-Courville & Pogas 2009). Lo and Wei (2005) found that Taiwanese adolescents with increased exposure to Internet pornography reported increased sexual permissive attitudes and sexually permissive behavior. Also, the volume of intentional exposure to Internet pornography has a relationship with sexual preoccupancy, defined as a strong cognitive engagement in sexual issue, including thinking frequently about sex. Häggström-Nordin, Hanson, and Tydén (2005) examined the association between pornography consumption and sexual practices of high school students in Sweden. The results of the study showed that 98% of males and 76% of female respondents had been exposed to pornography. The study concluded that having sexual intercourse with a friend, group, oral, and actual sex were all associated with frequent exposure to SEM online. According to a

national survey conducted by the National Campaign for the Prevention of Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in the United States, 20% of teens, aged 13 to 19 years, had sent or posted nude or seminude pictures or videos of themselves; 31% of them reported having received a nude or seminude picture via cell phone or email from someone; and 29% had such a photos/videos shared with them (Collins, Martino, & Shaw, 2011). Guan and Subrahmanyam (2009) suggested that the negative aspect of the Internet on adolescents include Internet addiction, online risks such as exposure to SEM, and sexual socialization. Other researchers have engaged the relationship between SEM and sexual aggression among the adolescents (e.g., Malamuth & Huppert, 2005). The results of the study disclosed that male adolescents who possessed certain risks exhibit sexually aggressive behavior, following exposure to pornography. These researchers further suggested that not only are these higher risk male adolescents more likely to be exposed to such media, but when they are exposed, they are likely to be transformed by exposure, such as changes in attitude about the acceptance of casual and premarital sex.

Nigerian researchers have equally carried out studies on the relationship between exposure to online sexual contents and sexual behavior of the adolescents. This became important against the backdrop that the Internet sites contain morally offensive, sexually explicit messages and pictures, including outrageous scenes of bestiality (Oyewumi, 2004). According to Oyewumi (2004), these images often create tension in an already anxious society, furthering antisocial dispositions among adolescents. African adolescents are particularly vulnerable to inappropriate materials and are more susceptible to the negative influences of uncensored information largely because sex education does not often take place at home. Kunnuji's (2011) study in Lagos State, Nigeria, discovered that 46% of adolescents had willfully participated in online sexual activities and were involved in one or more activities with males or females. Also, 80% of these respondents were involved in at least one online sexual activity. Abdullahi et al.'s (2013) study on sexual and health behavior of adolescents in selected high schools in Ilorin, Nigeria, reported that sexual behavior of adolescents was influenced by new media. The study found out that of the 68% of the respondents in possession of smart devices, 100% used their phones to chat, 43% *sometimes* used the phone to flirt while more than half of the respondents (55%) disclosed they *sometimes* used their phones to access porn-related materials. The study revealed that only 32.4% used the smart phones to access educational-related materials. In Oshogbo, Nigeria, researchers discovered that 38.8% of the respondents used the Internet as a source of information on sexual issues while 78% used it for accessing SEMs (Asekun-Olarinmoye et al., 2014). Asekun-Olarinmoye et al. (2014) further showed that an average of 15% of the respondents practiced coitus, oral sex, masturbation, and sex. Owen, Behun, Manning, and Reid (2012) noted that online

pornography exposes adolescents to learn different sex styles and initiations of new noncoital behaviors such as mutual masturbation, oral sex, and fingering.

Other researchers have focused attention on the widespread use of the Internet for sexual orientation for the adolescents. Some have attributed obsession to online sexual content to absence of parental and teachers' advice on sexual issues. It is argued that lack of parental or teachers' advice on sexual matters has aggravated the search for alternative sex education among Nigerian adolescents. Aji et al. (2013) are of the opinion that most parents and teachers do not feel comfortable discussing sexual matters with their adolescents; they are either shy to discuss sex-related issues with their adolescent children and students or think discussion would encourage them to indulge in sexual activities. Others have attributed this to culture. Therefore, the communication gap between parents, teachers, and adolescents on sex education often encourage adolescents to seek alternative sources of information for sexual matters which include online contents and friends. In Nnewi, Nigeria, 47.2% of the adolescents received information about sexual issues from friends and peer groups online, 30% from the television, and 7% from newspapers and magazines (Aji et al., 2013). In a study carried out in south-western Nigeria by Longe, Chiemeke, Onifade, Balogun, and Longe (2007), 53% of the respondents disclosed they viewed pornography on the Internet. All these have very serious impact on reproductive health discourse among young people. Previous studies have shown that unguided and unregulated sex activities among adolescents have had negative impact on sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among this age group. A report found that adolescents account for nearly half of the 20 million new cases of STIs globally (Dehne & Riedner, 2005). In Nigeria, it was reported that adolescents account for 80% of unsafe induced abortion-related complications and more than 40% of HIV/AIDS related cases (Iwokwagh, Agbanna, & Agbanna, 2014). This development requires proper understanding using relevant theories.

## Theoretical Underpinnings

The role of theory in research is critical. Theories are usually abstract but are important frameworks for researchers to establish links between the abstract and the concrete, the theoretical and the empirical and thought and statements (Neuman, 2007). The efficacy of theories in research has inspired the need to employ suitable theoretical frameworks in this article to understand the interplay between the new media and adolescents' social behavior, with more specific reference on sexual behaviors. However, Neuman (2007) noted that theory is not fixed; it is provisional and open to revision and grows into more accurate and comprehensive explanations about the make-up and operation of the social world. Therefore, the theories employed in this article include generational cohort theory (GCT), social learning theory



(SLT), and uses and gratification theory (U&G). These theories explain why African adolescents learn and use new media for sexual orientation. They are useful in understanding why erotic dances like lap dance, *twerking*, and *one corner* are widely accepted and celebrated among young Africans, especially in Nigeria.

## GCT

How young and old people tend to view the world around them and their perceptions of the reality usually vary. The reason for this variance is not farfetched. The answer to this intriguing question lies with the GCT. According to generation cohort theory, variance exists between generations because the era or generation that we are born usually influences our world view and our views of reality. Different terms and terminologies are used by scientists to describe differences from generation to generation. These are “Baby Boomer,” “Generation X,” the “Millennial generation,” “Generation Y,” and other similar terms. These terms are used to describe groups of people at different ages with different world views. The concepts are borne out of the curiosity of generation cohort theorists to dissect how different generations develop different value systems, different world views, and different perceptions of the reality and the impact that this has on how younger and older people interact with the world around them and with each other.

A generation of people is defined as a group of people who do not only share birth years but also share distinctive characteristics, orientations, values, and attitudes as a result of them experiencing the same social and historical events during their life course (Takase, Oba, & Yamashita, 2009). Codrington (2008) explained that a generation is a social location that has the potential to affect an individual’s consciousness in the same way as social class or culture does. Codrington (2008) observed that individuals who belong to the same generation are endowed to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process, and a generational consciousness is formed. This involves the development of “collective mentalities that mirror a dominant view of the world, reflecting similar attitudes, values and providing a basis for shared action.”

From these definitions, it is clear that cohort categorization is beyond sharing a birth generation. It includes an understanding of the sociopolitical and economic dimensions that have shaped the feelings, attitudes, and views of the generation in question. In other words, belonging to the same age group does not necessarily link people to any meaningful compartment, rather, it is the events that occur at various critical points during the group’s lifetime that create cohorts and define their core values (Foley, 2000). A particular interest shall be the influence of the First and Second World Wars on the perception of the reality by a particular age group. While age groups may have some usefulness (horizontal aspect of generation), Gaspar and Ramos (2005)

noted that the term “generation” “highlights the thinking and behaviour pattern of a given part of a society that is highly concentrated at an age group, but which can cross many age groups vertically” (pp. 419-420).

Generation theory has its roots in different studies but is deeply rooted in sociological studies. For instance, Strauss and Howe popularized GCT in their book titled *Generations, the History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069*. Both posited that society often alternates between a cycle of growth, conformity, decay, and divisiveness and that each cycle is driven by the changes in the values and attitudes of each new generation (Drago, 2006). Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) has been adjudged to be one of the most influential figures in generation theory for he was the one that propounded the core tenets of the theory. Mannheim asserted that cohorts within populations are bound together around shared experiences rather than the traditionally established lines of social class, geography, gender, and other social constructs. He posited that “simple generational separation performed on the basis of so many calendar years did not furnish a sound foundation for the analysis of social process and change” rather “chronological cohorts experiencing the same cultural events, interpreted through a similar lens based on their life-stage of sociological development, would forever share a sense of a common perspective” (Taylor, 2008, p. 4).

Furthermore, Mannheim developed the concepts of “generational location,” “generation as actuality,” and “generation units” to extrapolate his proposition on the matter. These concepts subscribe to the idea of intergenerational and sociogenerational differences, illustrated by the unique traits and belief systems prevalent in various generations (Pendergast, 2009). Generational location is defined as a passive category based on the chronological span of time for the birth years of a cohort of individuals which often affects the potential of the generation (Pendergast, 2009). Generational actuality goes beyond the passive designation to include the way and manner in which a generation of people react to social transformations and how these reactions form an integral part of their existence and personality formation (Pendergast, 2009). Mannheims’s mention of the generation units represented by pockets of subgroups located within a particular location or region (Pendergast, 2009), belonging to the same generations, endows the individuals sharing in [it] with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them to certain characteristics, modes of thought, experiences, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action (quoted from Pendergast, 2009, p. 3).

Contemporary scientists have used GCT in the understanding of the differences in perception from generation to generation. Previous studies have found that generations differed in their basic human values. For instance, Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins (2007) explored how four generations differ in their openness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence. Noble and Schewe

(2003) also noted that a subject's ratings on certain value dimensions could precisely predict their generational cohort. They found that 45% of the people sampled were accurately classified into their cohort grouping. Jorgensen (2003) argued that, although results in this area lack the necessary supportive empirical evidence, this field is dominated by qualitative experiences and observations of authors and practitioners.

Like many other theories, GCT has been widely criticized. One of the criticisms of the GCT is that it provides a universal assumption of a generation without particular attention to specific social issues such as power and class affecting life course (France & Roberts, 2015). Whether or not the theory is relevant to understanding African realities and problems is still being questioned. Although, generation after generation in Africa have lived in different historical epoch but they are being confronted with similar challenges of poverty, diseases, corruption, ethnic, and religious conflagrations. In view of the inadequacies of the GCT, France and Roberts (2015) proposed the need for researchers with GCT orientation to design an approach of paradigm of youth studies that is ecological and both accepts "social change" and "continuity" as critical parts of the life course, one that recognizes the nature and influence of power and social reproduction in shaping the experience of being young.

The criticisms notwithstanding, GCT offers relevant assumptions in the understanding of the attitude of youth and social change in contemporary societies (Wyn & Woodman, 2006). The past century has witnessed the "shrinking" of the world into "global village" or "global household" triggered by globalization forces coupled with the effects of international media, communication technologies, and the increasing interconnectedness of the world. This, indeed, is a defining moment for most adolescents in SSA who are part of the global population of young people. When impacted by the same events and sharing similar experiences (e.g., mobile phones and the Internet), young people are likely to have similar underlying value systems, regardless of country of origin, gender, social class, power, or community of birth. These "value systems" are the drivers and good predictors of behavior, attitude, and expectations. Therefore, GCT is useful to understand how the personality and existence of the new generation of middle and upper class adolescents in SSA is shaped by the new media and associated applications and technology. GCT offers an understanding of the attitude of adolescents of middle and upper class in SSA toward the new media in the era of globalization and information and technology. Nevertheless, GCT does not provide an absolute answer. Other theories may have provided a complementary approach to GCT, hence, the SLT.

## SLT

Unlike the GCT, SLT is an influential theory in social psychology. It is one of the most celebrated and the most widely

used social cognitive theories in social psychology. The core tenets and basic assumptions of the theory were formulated by Albert Bandura almost half a century ago. According to Bandura and the supporters of SLT, children or adolescents learn new information and behaviors by watching and mimicking. They argue that behaviors are learnt through direct observation and internalization. SLT asserts that behaviors are usually triggered by some antecedents like observation and watching that often lead to imitation of the observed behavior through the process of retrieval, rehearsal, or training. One of the mechanisms that aid learning is what is termed *reciprocal determinism* which explains that individual behavior is both caused and structured by the environment (Bandura, 1978).

Bandura and his colleagues embarked on a research journey in the 1960s and 1970s to (a) confirm whether or not the media were as effective a transmission tool for learned aggression as were live models, and (b) ascertain which mode of filmed aggressive portrayals was a more influential facilitator of symbolic imitation (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963). Initially, they attempted to answer these questions in a detailed experiment known as "Bobo Doll study." Findings from this and subsequent studies proved that children have the tendencies to imitate aggressive behaviors of a live model and generalized such responses to novel settings in the absence of that model (Hart & Kritsonis, 2006) and that the media are an effective tool for learning. The followings are the core assumptions of the SLT:

- i. Observational learning is achieved when the modeled behavior is structured and rehearsed symbolically and then overtly enacted; the retention of that behavior occurs when the modeled behavior is coded into words, labels, or images.
- ii. The adoption of the modeled behavior is strengthened when the outcomes of the behavior are valued, seen as important to the individual or lead to desirable outcome.
- iii. The modeled behavior is more likely to be integrated by the observer when the model has characteristics similar to the observer. In other words, where there is a cognitive-behavioral connection with the model, the model is admired by the observer, and the behavior that is adopted has practical or functional value (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura's analysis shares some similar assumptions with Edward Sutherland's (1939) differential association theory of crime. In his theory of crime, Sutherland asserts that adolescents or children acquire their beliefs about their delinquent behaviors from real or imagined role models, such as close friends and parents. Sutherland has argued that deviant behaviors are learnt the same way normal behaviors are learnt. Like Sutherland, social learning assumes

that psychological and environmental factors collectively influence the development of specific behaviors. The theory emphasizes the importance of attending to and modeling the behaviors, cognitions (e.g., attitudes and beliefs), and emotions of others.

Like many other social science theories, SLT has been criticized on the grounds of internal validity such as selection bias, history maturation, and ambiguous temporal sequence (Hart & Kritsonis, 2006). On selection bias, Bandura is accused of overgeneralizing his findings. Although participants in Bandura's study were selected from upper-middle class White dominated nursery of Stanford University, he overgeneralized his findings to explain aggressive behavior of children in lower socioeconomic communities. This was seen as a big flaw in Bandura's study. The shortcomings notwithstanding, Bandura's theory has proven immensely useful in understanding the variations in human aggression, especially in children and adolescents. Beyond aggressive behaviors, the theory has been widely applied to numerous social issues including adolescents' contraception, coercive sexual behavior, and in the understanding of why crimes are committed (Hart & Kritsonis, 2006). In this study, the theory is useful in understanding how an exposure to SEMs and celebration of drugs and other substances in social media, including music videos, foster similar behavior in African adolescents, as learning from the media (both old and new media) is largely dependent on a series of mental processes that include attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1978). Through the media, African adolescents not only learn what is likely to be the outcome of sexual activity or substance use, but also consciously engage in it or approve of it, and come to see themselves as able to engage in similar activities themselves. Martino, Collins, and Kanouse (2005) argued that the relationship between exposure to sexual content could be explained in whole by shifts in users perceptions of themselves which include ability to negotiate sexual situations, perceptions of norms regarding sexual activity, and beliefs about the consequences of engaging in intercourse. Although SLT provides an avenue to understand the relationship between observation and learning, it fails to provide the motivational forces for imitation. This gap is addressed under the U&G.

## U&G

U&G is traced to the 1940s when researchers in the United States became inquisitive about reasons for viewing traditional media especially radio and TV programs including soap operas and game quiz shows. Most studies then concluded that different people use the media for different motivations and purposes. Several years ago, Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) argued that people use the media for five important reasons: cognitive, affective, personal integrated, social integrity, and tension release needs. According to Katz et al. (1973), cognitive needs include using the media to

acquire information, knowledge, and understanding; affective stands for emotional needs include pleasures and feelings; personal integrated needs include needs for credibility and stability status; social integrity needs include needs for interacting with family and friends; while affective needs include needs for escaping and diversion. Similarly, according to Bakers and White (2010), users play an active role in choosing and using the media, including new media. They argue that a user seeks out a media source that fulfills particular needs. With regard to the Internet and the new media, Ruggiero (2000) highlighted three main categories of use and gratification:

- a. Content users of the Internet: the need for finding specific information which are gratified with contents.
- b. Process users: gain gratification from the experience of purposeful navigating or random browsing of the Internet in its functional process.
- c. Social users: using the Internet for a wide range of forming and deepening social ties (also see Intermedia Survey Institute, 2004).

Like other theories, U&G has been widely criticized on so many fronts. The theory is criticized for being methodically and theoretically deficient. Some criticize it for being too simple, especially given the complexity of human motivations. Others see it as being too vague and nontheoretical (see O'Donohoe, 1994). Notwithstanding, U&G provides an insight into how and why adolescents use social media to fulfill certain needs and gratifications which may include cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension free needs. This theory is thus relevant to understanding why African adolescents with access to mobile phones and the Internet may deliberately manipulate media contents to meet certain needs. Previous studies have found that the majority of the young people used the SNSs for social and affection needs to vent negative feelings, recognition, entertainment, and cognitive needs. For instance, Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) found that university students joined Facebook out of their need to socialize with their friends, in search of status and social recognition. They made the discovery from an Internet survey of 2,603 university students in Texas. Among the sampled population, the intensity of Facebook use was strongly related to other gratifications such as feelings of personal satisfaction, confidence, and participation in civic life.

In summary, U&G theory stresses that people, especially African adolescents, seek social media to meet certain needs. However, sexual curiosity peaks in adolescence, due to hormonal changes, which may result in adolescents' intense interest in sex. The curiosity for sexual satisfaction may further be exacerbated by easy access to explicit sexual materials online. Peter and Valkenburg's (2011) study reported that adolescents are attracted to SEM online. Wusu (2013) perceived the recipients as actively influencing the processes of

communication as they selectively choose, attend to, perceive, and retain the media messages on the basis of their needs and beliefs. The theory explicated that as people are actually responsible for the contents they generate and consume, it underlines why they would want to continually be exposed to a particular medium in an era of multiplicity of voices without necessarily being compelled to.

## An Appraisal of the Theories

The new media have become parts of most young people's lifestyle in SSA, especially in their quest for relationships and socializing. The literature is clear that this has become a trending social phenomenon, and globally, adolescents have turned to the new media as a means of communication and social networking. In this article, attempt is made to review relevant theories that explicate adolescents' involvement in online interaction. Theories reviewed include GCT, SLT, and U&G. On one hand, the GCT stresses that human generations are different in basic values and that human behavior is a response to its environment. For instance, present African adolescents are born into a technological-driven society where new media trends are rapidly growing and exposure to explicit content online is common. Adolescents globally are developing in media ecology where digital and networked media play an important and central role. Nowadays, most adolescents and relatively educated and wealthy parents in African cities prioritize the ownership of smart devices and Internet access. Phones are common gifts for birthday and school celebrations for the young people by most parents in African cities. Therefore, adolescents engage in a shared culture where new social media influence and shape their behaviors. Many of these young people establish online friendships, and the use of social media provides them with the opportunity to feel accepted among their peers. This trend has resulted in the use of Facebook and other forms of new media to satisfy sociocognitive and affective needs and desires, which can include soliciting sexual information, accessing explicit sexual contents, and engagement in illicit sexual behaviors. Some reports have shown that about 70% of the new media programs contain sexual contents such as erotic photos and videos depicting live sex acts (Collins et al., 2011).

SLT, on the other hand, affirms that environmental and psychological factors tend to influence adolescents' behavior. The theory posits that learning is not purely behavioral, but it is also a cognitive process that takes place in a social context. According to the theory, learning and mimicking can occur by observing behavior and consequences of such behavior. In other words, the theory affirms that learning involves observation and extraction of information from those observations, and making the decisions about the performance of the behavior. This is inclusive of sexual behavior. The theory provides an insight into understanding how African adolescents are increasingly becoming present in the

global online business where they observe, learn, and model their behavior toward the ones they have proximity with online because of the revolution in the online industry. The same way adolescents may learn good behavior through reward; they also have tendency to learn alternative behavior that is gratifying. Lap dance, *one corner* dance, and *twerking* are clear manifestations and demonstrations of the impact and influence of the new media on young Nigerians, many of which are learnt via the social media. Finally, the U&G posits that the use of social media by the adolescents satisfies some basic socioemotional needs and sexual curiosities inclusive. Originally, this theory emerged as a psychological communication perspective that examined how individuals used the "old" media for gratification or satisfaction. As an audience-based theoretical framework, it is based on the assumption that individuals select the media, including the new media, to fulfill certain desires and needs. Contemporary researchers have used this theory to understand how adolescents use the new media to satisfy specific needs and desires. For instance, Subrahmanyam and Lin (2007) suggested that adolescents who suffer from limited social resources or social capital use the Internet and online communication to offset the lack of social contact in their real lives.

## Conclusion

African adolescents, especially those in urban centers, live in the era of what some authors refer to as *the new media ecology*. While this ecology or environment provides opportunity for learning, it also contains dangerous contents that could be detrimental to adolescents' sociosexual development. Scholars have noted that antisocial behaviors are everywhere online. This article has used theoretical pluralism to understand and explain the interconnectedness between the media and adolescents' behavior in Africa. Theoretical pluralism offers complex ways of analyzing key variables of discourse based on their dynamism. Also known as eclecticism, it recognizes a constellation of factors influencing behavior and takes into consideration virtually all perspectives in identifying, changing, explaining, and determining behavior. Eclecticism does not hold rigidly to a single perspective, instead it draws upon multiple theories, styles, or ideas to gain complementary insights into a subject, or applies different theories in particular cases. With regard to understanding the use of Internet-based applications among young people in SSA, the usefulness of the assumptions of GCT, SLT, and U&G cannot be overemphasized. For instance, adolescents of middle and upper class in SSA are born into a technological-driven society where the new media are ubiquitous and useful for personal development (GCT). They, therefore, rely on online contents to satisfy certain cognitive, affective, personal, social, and psychological needs which the social media provide (U&G) through learning process. Based on this premise, where there is lack of familial support, poor self-esteem, and poor external locus of control among



African adolescents, African adolescents are likely to pick up and engage in certain antisocial activities that are detrimental to their personal and societal development as there is a possible correlation between an increase in media presentations of antisocial behavior (such as sex and erotic dances) and an increase in public tolerance of those acts. Through the new media, African adolescents are learning and reproducing erotic dances. Pole dancing is also trending in urban centers at club houses where young people dominate. In Nigeria urban cities like Lagos and PortHarcourt, there are strong evidence that some of these young people abandon schools to become full-time erotic dancers.

The new media have evolved as the modern day primary socialization agent in SSA, which are constantly shaping and influencing behavioral changes among adolescents. The advent of technology and emerging trends of the new media has facilitated adolescents to observe, imitate, and learn certain social behaviors, including sexual behavior in the comfort of their rooms or cafe where they play and surf the Internet. It is important, therefore, that new media developers in Africa, parents, and schools take effective measures to monitor and curb access to illicit and dangerous online contents. There is also the necessity for a synergy between parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in the management of online contents in SSA to avoid repeated episodes of online sexual attacks as widely reported across the continent. This has become important against the backdrop that sexuality and reproductive health matters are shrouded in secrecy in SSA for certain religious and cultural undertones. Most African institutions are very conservative on sexual matters with young people. Parents feel talking about sex education encourages young people to indulge in them. Hence, reproductive health matters are rarely discussed within the family, school, and religious institutions making online SEMs potent for African adolescents, which is usually difficult for them to safely negotiate through. This has further made adolescents, especially females, vulnerable to online sexual predators and harassers. Studies have shown that where an adolescent, especially female, is sexually molested, she may suffer brain injuries, develops poor interpersonal relationships, and manifests learning impairments as well as emotional and psychological problems. Anxiety, depression, aggression, attempted suicide, use of drugs, and sexual indulgence have been reported among sexually abused adolescents. An aggravated sexual harassment may be associated with an increased amount of psychosocial health problems compared with less aggravated cases (Abdullahi, Khan, & Ajimati, 2017). Therefore, effective parent-child communication regarding reproductive health matters including sex and relationship education (SRE) in the school curriculum and homes is non-negotiable. This can enhance best sex practices among adolescents across the continent. SRE has been adjudged to be efficacious in instilling information, skills, and values required by young people to take responsibility for their sexual health and well-being. It has a significant impact on

reducing sexual partners, improving health preventive behavior, delaying sexual initiation, and reducing exposure to online harassers (Abdullahi et al., 2013; Sex Education Forum, 2010).

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