



SOCIAL MEDIA CELEBRITIES AND THE ADOPTION OF LIFESTYLE AMONGST UNDERGRADUATES OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, AKURE

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ABSTRACT

While fast becoming part of our daily life, social media with its ubiquitous characteristic has lots of effects on Nigerian youths, most of which might not necessarily be positive. Most Nigerian youths engross themselves with outward appearances and status occasioned by a somewhat idolization of social media celebrities on various online platforms. The objective of this study was to find out how much of an influence social media celebrities have on the lifestyle adoption of youths in Nigeria. The study considered lifestyle from five perspectives namely: dress code, ability to use time wisely, decision making habits, extravagant spending and use of drugs. Anchored on Social Learning theory, the study made use of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Findings showed that 69.2% of the study participants are exposed to explicit contents posted by social media celebrities, while (43%) of the respondents are influenced by the dressings of celebrities on social media. The study recommends that operators of social media platforms make use of censorship functions for their websites and applications to check and frown at individuals and celebrities who publish explicit contents that can harm the psyche of the youths.

Keywords: Social media, Social media celebrities, Youth, Lifestyle, Adoption

INTRODUCTION

Celebrities have assumed a god-like status in society. They are mostly idolized and perceived as role models among fans. According to Ang & Chang (2016 pg. 139), “The concept of ‘celebrity’ can be seen as an ‘ever-changing performative practice’ involving ‘ongoing maintenance of a fan

base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona.”

The advent of social media gave rise to a new crop of celebrities referred to as “Social Media Celebrity” also known as “Internet Celebrity”, “Micro-Celebrities” or “Cyber Stars” (Rich, 2009:1). These are individuals who have become popular on social media resulting from frequent posts and interaction with followers on social media/ the internet. Since the youths have so much access to multiple media platforms, the lifestyle of celebrity culture could possibly have much influence on the thought patterns, habits, decision making and almost like a whole new lifestyle change for youths. (Omenuga, Uzuegbunam, & Ndolo, 2016).

Contemporary youths have taken a liking to social media sites and half of the time, the one you could be lecturing or speaking to at this moment may be thinking about the latest gossip blog or sneakily swiping through tabs on his phone. Statistics have shown that globally, there are 3.5 billion social media users, which equates to nearly half of the world’s population (Mohsin, 2019) and of this 3.5 billion users, 90% of youths are on YouTube, 37% of them are on Instagram, 73% on Snapchat and 22% of youths are on Twitter (Smith, 2019). One of the rampant effects of social media usage is addiction. It negatively affects the youths’ behavior as they are unable to stay aware of their surroundings, partake in real life communication or build skills that could be helpful in future. (Raut & Patil, 2016)

They furthered by stating that celebrities develop and manage their fan bases through deliberate self-presentation using a variety of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. From a psychological perspective, celebrities are usually presented as role models and it is a normal part of life development for people to model themselves on their favorite celebrities as part of the process of identity exploration. Ang et al (2016).

However, celebrities are known most of the time for not having regard for the rules guiding the publishing of their contents on social media websites. In 2017, (Dorking, 2017) talked about a celebrity who used his Instagram account as a medium to de-star another celebrity who happened to be his fiancée. Instagram has terms and conditions which are averse to posting of immoral images, and this led to the suspension of the celebrity’s account. This however did not stop him from migrating to his Twitter account and continued his attack there for 7.6 million followers to view. Dorking (2017), goes further to say that it’s a norm for celebrities to have some form of

aggressive hate towards one another online and the social media has in some way taken this and twisted it into a series of funny memes.

Unlike the real world, there are no social cues to tell youths whether copying a certain behavior online is socially acceptable or not. The social media constantly paints celebrities in attractive light despite the immoral contents some of them publish online and this can possibly make the youths adopt socially unacceptable lifestyles as against good moral values. Social media has the capacity to trivialize a rather serious issue as a celebrity scandal and twists it into something funny that would not be perceived as wrong when viewed by users. Studies have proven that when youths see violence in idols or old people in general, they not only copy it but they also expand on it, adding their ideas and opinions to it. This act can be described as creating a massive pot of soup for cultural damage. From the continuous bashing of online celebs, to the portrayal of obscene or uncalled for content (graphic images, videos and published statements), this study hopes to find out the intensity or show how much of celebrities' lifestyle is being perpetuated by Nigerian youths. The study hopes that the usage of Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA) undergraduates will represent other undergraduates or youths in other universities nationwide based on culture, religion and the affected age group for the study.

Objective of Study

The general objective of the study was to find out the influence of social media celebrity on the adoption of lifestyle amongst undergraduates of the Federal University of Technology Akure.

The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the extent to which social media celebrity contents influence the dress code of undergraduates of FUTA.
2. determine the extent to which social media celebrity contents influence the decision making skills of undergraduates of FUTA.
3. determine the extent to which social media celebrity contents influence the amount of time spent online in undergraduates of FUTA.
4. determine the extent to which social media celebrity contents influence the money spending habits of undergraduates in FUTA.
5. determine the extent to which social media celebrity contents influence the adoption of drug use among undergraduates of FUTA.

Celebrity Content on Social Media

Often starting as a hobby, creating online content on a personal blog or channel can become a fulltime job. By creating content on a daily basis, large communities are built up with thousands of loyal followers. New followers and subscribers are gained every day. YouTube is probably one of the most popular platforms on which creators share their contents. With one single video it is possible to reach millions of people. Then with the inclusion of other social media platforms, the followers get to follow the life of their favorite YouTuber.

It, in fact, is very important for celebrities to use social media platforms to portray their content or lives online for fans to see. This is simply for relevance in a large society. Celebrities can now bypass traditional news media and tailor messages the way they please. Not only does this give celebrities their own voice and choose what they want to disclose, it also speeds up the process of releasing news and allows them to connect with their audience on a deeper level. Thomas Clayton, CEO of Bubbly, said an additional benefit of bypassing standard distribution channels and using their own social media to promote and distribute materials is that it is less costly and produces higher revenues. Not only does it increase revenue but the unregulated content benefits the fan in that they feel a more personal connection to the stars they idolize. Many celebrities use various social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to engage in constant conversation with their fans. For instance, Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, and Justin Bieber each have more than 60 million fans following them on Twitter or Facebook.

Celebrities adopt various platforms of social media to share their content, promote their cause or increase their fan base because of the possibility that one or more platforms may not be accessible in one country or another. Facebook for example, as of July 2009, was blocked from operating in Mainland China. According to Mai, (2018), China uses a sophisticated censorship system known as the Great Firewall to block access to a long list of social media platforms and foreign news organizations. Facebook was banned due to a riot by independent activists who were residents in Xinjiang, a western province in China. The Chinese government discovered that the activists were using the platform as a main source for their communications. (Zucchi, 2019).

Celebrity Content on Social Media and the Youth

The internet is filled with photographs, that may have been edited and airbrushed, and videos of celebrities displaying their perfect body shapes, love for money, sex and drugs or an inability to handle social feuds in private. These published contents pressure young people to meet up with unobtainable image standards. (Parveen, 2018)

When celebrities constantly post their content online, it becomes normalized in the eyes of the youth who view it. Candy (2014) stated in an online essay how a survey was carried out in a university to find out why students started smoking. Results proved that about 40% of the students started smoking because they wanted to look like their favorite celebrities while smoking. This example shows clearly how the imitation of a celebrity by the youth has a negative influence on not just the health of the youth, but also their lifestyle.

The youth follow the make-up, attire and the behavior of their favorite celebrities which in turn affect their personality or lifestyle. An example is how the majority of the youth today take it as a norm to use derogatory words or display immoral acts in public places and in the presence of their families. Unarguably, many anti-social behaviours perpetuated by contemporary youths can be traced to social media contents they are exposed to. (Candy, 2014)

Theoretical Framework

The theory emphasises that observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others are key factors that contribute to one's lifestyle choices (McLeod 2016). Social learning theory accentuates the importance of observation and imitation that takes place from an individual's perspective through the characters portrayed via mass media, and how it brings a change to the behavior, knowledge, attitudes and values of the audience. Youth's exposure to social media therefore, has the tendency of affecting their behaviour. This was part of the predictions of Albert Bandura in 1977 when he propounded the Social Learning Theory. Bandura believed learning could not take place without external reinforcements. As youths are daily exposed to an array of social media contents including posts by their favourite social media celebrities, there is likelihood that they would begin to model the social media celebrities whose contents they are exposed to on social media. The possibility that a social

media celebrity would be imitated becomes more likely if the celebrity holds an admired status and his or her activities are highly valued among the young people. The imitated behavior is gradually reinforced and the individual identifies with the model and gradually tries out the behavior (Alice, 2014). The theory affirms that Nigerian youths are exposed to the contents posted on social media and they are able to identify with the celebrities.

Methodology

This research study adopted the Mixed-Method approach involving a combination of survey research design and Focus Group Discussion. The approach was to ensure that all data were captured to achieve a robust result. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, a sample size of 382 was selected from the population of 13,000 undergraduates in FUTA according to the university's website. Eight undergraduates (one from each faculty) were selected for the FGD through a simple random technique. A well-structured questionnaire, a Focus Group Discussion guide as well as a digital voice recorder were used for data collection.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Exposure to Social Media Celebrity Contents

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Undecided
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
I view explicit content from social media celebrities when they publish it online	113(32.2%)	129(37%)	43(12.2%)	26(7.5%)	39(11.1%)
I don't think it's wrong to view or remake explicit content by social media celebrities	86(24.5%)	108(30%)	46(13.1%)	60(17%)	54(15.4%)
I browse for explicit social media celebrity content online without being monitored	79(23%)	77(22%)	98(28%)	65(19%)	31(9%)
I tend to reenact or remake explicit content and post it online like social media celebrities do	45(13%)	45(13%)	96(27%)	118(34%)	46(13%)
I miss deadlines for school activities sometimes because I'm viewing	39(11%)	53(15%)	110(31%)	124(35%)	24(7%)

social media celebrity content
online

From table 1, 69.2% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they view explicit content from social media celebrities when they publish it online, 54.5% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they don't think it is wrong to view or remake explicit content like social media celebrities; 45% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they browse for explicit social media celebrity content online without being monitored, 51.4% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they tend to reenact or remake explicit content and post it online like social media celebrities do, 26% of the respondents strongly agreed to the notion that they miss deadlines for school activities sometimes because they're viewing social media celebrity content online. This indicates that some of the respondents attested to missing deadlines for school activities because of the need to view social media celebrity content. This is in line with the tenets of uses and gratification theory and modelling theory that audiences make use of the social media to satisfy their affective needs, which includes all kinds of emotion, pleasures and moods (Vinney, 2019).

Table 3: Effects of social media celebrity contents on dress code

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Undecided
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
I like to purchase the clothing items I see celebrities wear online.	52(15%)	109(31%)	53(15%)	79(23%)	57(16%)
I prefer to dress indecently like social media celebrities.	46(13%)	67(19%)	91(26%)	92(26%)	54(15%)
I like to purchase and wear flashy accessories like social media celebrities	31(9%)	79(23%)	90(26%)	102(29%)	48(14%)
I only purchase and wear foreign clothing like social media celebrities do	29(8%)	36(10%)	117(33%)	126(36%)	42(12%)
I only purchase and wear expensive clothing like social media celebrities do	18(5%)	42(12%)	112(32%)	138(39%)	40(11%)

Findings here show the effect of social media celebrity contents on the dress code of FUTA undergraduates. All the FGD participants agreed that they would want to dress up like their favorite online celebrities. One participant emphasized on wanting to dress like his favourite online celebrity forever. From the table, 46% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they like to purchase the clothing items they see celebrities wear online, 32% strongly agreed/agreed that they prefer to dress indecently like social media celebrities, 31% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they like to purchase and wear flashy accessories like social media celebrities, 18% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they only purchase and wear foreign clothing like social media celebrities do. Finally, the table depicts that 17% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they only purchase and wear expensive clothing like social media celebrities do. Cumulative results of the qualitative and quantitative data show that social media celebrity contents negatively affect the dress code of the Federal University of Technology undergraduates. This is in line with the findings of Chikezie (2017) which showed that Nigerian youths are affected by the way their favorite social media celebrities dress, talk, and handle issues about relationship, marriage and sex.

Table 4: Effects of Social Media Celebrity Content on Time Management

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Undecided
	Agree		Disagree		
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
I procrastinate doing assignments because I use the internet to view social media celebrity content.	39(11%)	114(33%)	82(23%)	85(24%)	30(9%)
I sometimes forget about important projects when I use social media to view celebrity content.	40(11%)	96(27%)	89(25%)	81(23%)	44(13%)
I lose track of time when I view social media celebrity content online.	85(24%)	147(42%)	40(11%)	60(17%)	18(5%)
I get distracted by social media celebrity content online when I'm occupied with important work.	55(16%)	119(34%)	61(17%)	73(21%)	42(12%)

I spend time online more than I spend time in reality of deadlines and projects. 68(19%) 94(27%) 79(23%) 46(13%) 63(18%)

Table 3 shows the response of respondents on the effect of social media celebrity content on time management. From the table, 44% of the respondents strongly agree that they procrastinate doing assignments because they use the internet to view social media celebrity content, 38% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they sometimes forget about important projects when they use the social media to view celebrity content, 66% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they lose track of time when viewing social media celebrity content online, 50% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they get distracted by social media celebrity content online when occupied with important work, 46% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed to the notion that they spend time online more than time spent in reality of deadlines and projects. Results here show that FUTA undergraduates are unable to manage their time well due to social media celebrity content online, (Ngonso, 2019) in his study on the influence of social media on youths, affirmed that youths have high tendency of getting addicted as they spend a lot of time on various social media platforms.

Table 4: Effects of Social Media Celebrity Content on Decision Making

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
I watch porn after viewing social media celebrity content	45(13%)	67(19%)	38(11%)	92(26%)	108(31%)
I engage in drug usage and alcohol after viewing social media celebrity content	13(4%)	40(11%)	19(5%)	56(16%)	222(63%)
My sexuality is based on the content I view from social media celebrities	31(9%)	38(11%)	31(9%)	51(15%)	199(57%)
I sometimes think like a social media celebrity when it comes to decision making	27(8%)	57(16%)	47(13%)	63(18%)	156(45%)

Qualitative and quantitative findings revealed the respondents' decision making not being influenced by social media celebrities. From the table, 32% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed to the notion that they watch porn after viewing social media celebrity content, 21% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their sexuality is based on the content they view from social media celebrities, 24% strongly agreed/agreed that they sometimes think like a social media celebrity when it comes to decision making. These infer that respondents were not influenced by social media celebrities in decision making about sexuality, what to watch and about other issues of life. This negates the findings of Candy (2014) that 40% of youths who smoke imbibed the habit because they saw it in their social media celebrities.

Table 5: Effects of Social Media Celebrity Content on Money Spending

	Strongly Agree N (%)	Agree N (%)	Undecided N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Strongly Disagree N (%)
I purchase items based on the usage or endorsement by a social media celebrity	36(10%)	115(33%)	29(8%)	53(15%)	117(33%)
I convince my peers to purchase items only if its endorsed by a social media celebrity	32(9%)	74(21%)	33(9%)	76(22%)	135(39%)
I can spend all my money on items online if I see a celebrity wear or endorse it	25(7%)	46(13%)	17(5%)	95(27%)	167(48%)
I borrow money from people if I don't have enough money to purchase items owned or endorsed by celebrities on social media	26(7%)	30(9%)	12(3%)	52(15%)	230(66%)
I only purchase items owned by celebrities on social media	17(5%)	23(7%)	32(9%)	87(25%)	191(55%)

Table 5 shows the effect of social media celebrity content on the money spending habits of the respondents. From the table, 44% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed they purchase items based on the usage or endorsement by a social media celebrity, 30% of the respondents strongly

agreed/agreed that they convince their peers to purchase items only if its endorsed by a social media celebrity, 20% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they can spend all their money on items online if they see a celebrity wear or endorse it, 16% of the respondents strongly agreed that they borrow money from people if they don't have enough money to purchase items owned or endorsed by celebrities on social media, 12% of the respondents strongly agreed they only purchase items owned by celebrities on social media, Results of the quantitative data also revealed that respondents would only buy items that appealed to them not because it is being advertised or used by their favourite social media celebrity. This negates the assumption of modelling theory that youths model celebrities they hold in high esteem. The study did not however go further to investigate whether the respondents would purchase items used by social media celebrities if a reward is attached to such action as proposed by the theory.

Table 6: Effects of Social Media Celebrity Content on Drug Use.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
I decided to start using drugs after viewing social media celebrity content	20(6%)	28(8.0%)	18(5%)	53(15%)	231(66%)
I am a regular drug user just like social media celebrities	21(6%)	36(10%)	18(5%)	42(12%)	233(67%)
I think it's cool to experience hard drugs because social media celebrities do it too	27(8%)	29(8%)	9(3%)	48(14%)	237(68%)
I can use drugs multiple times in a day if I want	21(6%)	52(15%)	10(3%)	36(10%)	231(66%)
I engage in smoking after viewing social media content	22(6%)	28(8%)	14(4%)	52(15%)	234(67%)

Table 6 shows frequencies of respondents' responses to the effect of social media celebrity content on drug use. 14% of the respondents strongly agreed that they decided to start using drugs after viewing social media celebrity content, 16% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they are a regular drug user just like social media celebrities, 21% of the respondents

strongly agreed/agreed that they can use drugs multiple times in a day if they want, 14% of the respondents strongly agreed that they engage in smoking after viewing social media content. Results here indicate that FUTA undergraduates would not engage in drug use and abuse simply because social media celebrities do so; the quantitative result corroborates findings here. This is also averse to the tenets of the model theory which states that youths model both positive and negative behaviors of social media celebrities.

Conclusion

Aggregation of both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that social media celebrities have a significant influence on the adoption of lifestyle among undergraduates in the Federal University of Technology, Akure. The most valuable asset (time) of the youths is worst hit by the constant surfing of the internet for social media celebrities' content. Youths need to be determined in putting their time to a more productive use.

Recommendations

1. Parents, government and religious organisations should educate the youths on the socially acceptable dress code in Nigeria and make the nation's traditional attires more attractive so that the youths who pattern their dress codes after social media celebrities would desist from such act
2. Youths should not allow the influence of social media celebrities to influence the way they live or the new aspect of lifestyle they decide to adopt.
3. The youths should use their free time for skills acquisition and development instead of surfing the social media for celebrity updates and the likes.
4. Social Media companies should create sensors for posts and updates for their users, especially for those with first class or celebrity status. This will be a good development for followers of such individuals as they will not be exposed to explicit celebrity contents or negative information that may be disapproving to the human psyche or have no positive value to standard and acceptable moral values.
5. The government should create enlightenment programmes that will transform social media into a means for societal development,

engage in the use of social media themselves (the government) and disseminate information that will benefit the youth of the country such as job opportunities, skill development programmes and so on.

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