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Perspectives On Social Media as Catalyst of Drug Abuse and Criminality in The Moral Compass of Teenagers in Asaba Metropolis, Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates how social media affects drug abuse and criminal behaviour among teenagers in the Asaba Metropolis of Delta State in Nigeria. The paper examined online drug content exposure among teenagers because these trends affect their substance use behaviour, declining morals and rising propensity for crime. The study adopted a descriptive survey of 398 teenagers aged 13 to 19 selected through multi-stage sampling. A 0.84 reliability scale (Cronbach's α = 0.84) measured the survey data before researchers analyses the same with SPSS v27 using descriptive statistics, Chi-square, and Pearson correlation and regression techniques. Results demonstrated that drug-use content viewing occurs frequently by 65.6% of respondents. In comparison, celebrity advertising patterns extend to 64.8% of the group, and 66.8% of respondents believe drug users obtain acceptance from society. Online exposure led to substance use among 65.3% of respondents, and curiosity about drugs due to digital content was reported by 63.5%, and 64.8% believed drug usage had a trendy status. The survey showed that 70.9% of participants had personal connections with peers who became criminals due to drug abuse. In comparison, 69.3% observed a drug-violence connection, and 69.6% reported seeing a connection between drug use and gender-based crimes. Further statistical analysis revealed no relationship between drug abuse and criminal behaviour and online exposures (p > 0.05). This research develops media crime knowledge by discovering broad evidence versus perception mismatches. The study proposes binary solutions, including stronger anti-drug advertisement efforts, educational digital literacy classes, and improved parental monitoring, to prevent youth from succumbing to digital moral deception.

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1. Introduction

The worldwide increase in adolescent drug abuse remains a serious public health problem that produces severe social, psychological, and economic consequences. Over the centuries, substance abuse has remained a historical practice that now transforms itself because of modern technology, changing social customs, and increased urbanization. The drug situation in Nigeria has become critical because narcotics have become increasingly available to teenage users while regulatory structures fail, coupled with worsening economic problems. Recorded statistics demonstrate worldwide trends showing that alcohol and narcotic abuse lead to violent crimes, adverse effects on decision-making abilities and generate significant social problems (Airede & Asibor, 2025; Isangadighi & Udeh, 2023). The United States created the Eighteenth Amendment of 1919 as a law to stop alcohol production and sales because of increased alcohol-linked offences throughout society. The historic recognition of substance-induced criminality emerged during the 1919 Eighteenth Amendment, even though the U.S. legislature later abolished this law in 1933 (Reichert et al., 2025; Hanafi, 2025; Akinpelu et al., 2024).

Drug abuse problems started in Nigeria soon after the British colonized the territories. The Dangerous Drugs Ordinance 1935 established one of the primary drug control policies during British rule in Nigeria (Ajiboye & Olademo, 2025). Law enforcement capabilities in Nigeria were simple before the 1980s, when drug crimes increased, which led to military action against traffickers until their executions in 1984. Narcotics control became both politicized and complicated due to the public executions of Gloria Okon under the Buhari-Idiagbon administration. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) became operational in 1989 through Decree 48 as a significant step toward fighting illegal drugs both for usage and trafficking. According to the NDLEA Act 1989, the agency received the authority to manage every drug enforcement operation and establish both preventive and penal protocols. The high rate of non-medical drug use in Africa features Nigeria among its leading nations that have not achieved control. UNODC records show that drug usage in Nigeria has reached 14.4% of adults between 15 and 64 years old by year's end 2018, which represents 14.3 million persons (UNODC, 2021). The primary drugs used among Nigeria's drug users were cannabis, tramadol, codeine, and cocaine (UNODC, 2021).

Teenagers' developmental challenges make them more vulnerable to peer pressure, curiosity, and stress because of social media outlets like Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook. Social media provides teens with modified and artificially attractive drug usage demonstrations because famous individuals commonly promote these activities. According to Sheth & Sharma (2025), the Pew Internet and American Life Project showed that internet access reached 95% among American teenagers aged 12–17. Nigeria follows this trend in parallel with substantial smartphone penetration. The combination of low media literacy and insufficient psycho-emotional development makes Nigerian teenagers vulnerable to drug promotion on media platforms, as well as drug transaction opportunities and peer-seen drug abuse expressed as normal behaviour. The authors Ajilore and Abdul (2019) establish that social media heightens social comparison behaviour, which lead to diminished self-esteem and an urge for escape that results in substance use among adolescents. Airede and Asibor (2025) stress that the steady stream of today's idealized lifestyles has negative impacts on both depressive thoughts and emotional strengths of teenagers. The growing number of teenage drug abusers creates effects that reach across individual health boundaries. The increased drug usage in Nigeria drives up instances of criminal conduct, including cultism, kidnapping, Yahoo-Yahoo fraud activities, political gang violence, and domestic abuse patterns (Isangadighi & Udeh, 2023). According to the UNODC (2021), only 12% of Nigerians recognize that drugs used by others harmed their families, reduced productivity at work, or compromised community welfare. This research investigates how associations between teenage drug abuse and social media usage in Nigeria affect adolescent substance exploration and establish drug habits and addiction. The research findings will

educate parents, educators, policy-makers, and health professionals about digital risks and justify essential intervention strategies.

The daily use of social media by Nigerian teens has increased their access to dangerous content, including drug-related content shown on various internet platforms. Fashioned from traditional peer influence and narcotics in the environment, social media adds an unregulated, extensive channel for adolescent exposure to drug-promoting content that hides behind entertainment and lifestyle inspirations and pop celebrity promotions. Our society currently faces a substantial problem because teenagers from our national core of leadership and productivity have been increasingly lured into substance abuse, which leads them to addiction, mental decline, academic failure, and criminal behaviour. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) conducts ongoing intervention efforts, but drug abuse continues to spread worse due to digital platforms that minimize the impact of narcotics use. Research on youth drug abuse patterns exists, but the study of how social media affects drug attitudes and behaviour among Nigerian adolescents, especially on the study area remains practically nonexistent in the literature. This immediate research responds to public health concerns by showing empirical proof for healthcare professionals while delivering feasible suggestions to policymakers about monitoring parents and enforcing online controls and neighborhood-based protection measures. The objectives of this study are to:

i. Examine whether teenagers in Asaba Metropolis are exposed to social media communications that promote drug use.
ii. Assess the extent of teenagers' exposure to social media messages that glamorize the use of psychedelic substances.
iii. Investigate whether exposure to social media content promoting mind-altering drugs influences teenagers to engage in substance abuse.
iv. Determine whether exposure to social media messages glamorizing drug use contributes to teenagers' involvement in criminal activities.
v. Explore the relationship between levels of drug abuse and the incidence of criminal behaviour among teenagers in Asaba Metropolis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Cultivation Theory

George Gerbner and Larry Gross's research introduced Cultivation Theory as a framework that maintains that regular, prolonged media consumption transforms fundamental views of reality (Asemah et al., 2017). People who watch large amounts of television content become more accepting of the media's worldview. Isangadighi et al. (2025) explain that exposure to particular media content without alternative information sources leads to subtle belief formation based on the reception theory. Modern social media platforms control media consumption above all other forms because they have surpassed television popularity rates, especially among adolescents. Young adults from the teenage demographic allocate their time to TikTok, along with Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp, thus continuously facing stylised displays of illegal drug consumption alongside criminal and rebellious content. The findings from this study become more significant due to the Cultivation Theory, which shows that frequently consuming modified media content causes teenagers to misinterpret social conventions and thus accept drug abuse and deviant activities as standard behaviour across the Asaba area and elsewhere.

Social Presence Theory

The Social Presence Theory, developed by Short, Williams, and Christie in 1976, evaluates how well communication media enable users to experience psychological presence from other participants. Son et al. (2025) explain in their research that digital interaction perceptions directly impact the interpretation process when users interpret messages. According to Maheux et al. (2025), individuals use personal stamps in digital platforms to show their readiness for social interaction with others. Teenagers on social media

platforms engage with various users, including their peers and influencers, and random contacts who often favourably show drug use. Mediated social connections produce strong emotional reactions and social sway. Social Presence Theory indicates that teenage users might repeat drug-related behaviour they see in their online networks since they view these actions as social norms that seem acceptable to them. Social Presence Theory demonstrates how emotional power combined with social relationship intensity in online communication causes adolescent vulnerability to substance problems and criminal behaviour.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), demonstrates how people acquire behaviour from observing others, after which they imitate those actions because they receive encouragement or escape penalties. Inside the social media environment, teenagers encounter numerous representations of drug use together with risky actions and antisocial conduct, which frequently come from influential figures, famous personalities, and admired peer members. This theoretical concept indicates that young students in Asaba have a higher chance of copying social media showing drug use alongside celebrated criminal conduct. Both apparent popular and successful content creators and peer validations within social communities reinforce young adults. Social media is a strong teaching influence that displays, restates, and publicly recognizes non-conforming behaviour.

Framing Theory

The media uses Framing Theory from Erving Goffman (1974) and Entman (1993) to choose which aspects of reality to highlight and present, which affects the audience's interpretation methods. The way media content structure selects what information to show and what to leave out allows the creation of particular stories that impact viewer perspectives and choices. Social media platforms use Framing Theory to display drug use and criminal behaviour, depicting them as humorous or stylish or rebellious, which results in misleading the actual consequences of these activities, according to the study. Young people who encounter these media images tend to underestimate drug-related dangers and criminal consequences due to the framing effect, which causes them to lose touch with moral and legal standards. The moral development of adolescents goes through a significant transformation due to how social media presents information, which modifies what they perceive as correct or incorrect behaviour.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

According to Uses and Gratifications Theory, which Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) constructed, users of media act as seekers who purposefully use media resources to fulfil their need for entertainment, along with discovering their identities and engaging socially while seeking to escape reality. Social media presents teenagers with an avenue to meet their psychological requirements, allowing them to receive content that matches their emotional needs or social desires. This research aligns with the theory indicating that teenagers interact with drug-promoting content through three main motivations, including relationship connection with peers, adrenaline-seeking, and emotional distress avoidance. Self-indulgent media use leads teenagers to encounter more dangerous material, enhancing their likelihood of replicating it. Social media thus transforms into a platform where users take part in content that leads to drug abuse and criminal behaviour.

2.2 Review of Related Empirical Studies

Experimental data demonstrate that the theoretical foundations of this study are valid. They produced substantial proof that demonstrates social media utilization by adolescents results in hazardous conduct such as substance abuse. Ajilore and Abdul (2019) state that social media education should become essential to therapeutic practice with teenage populations. The researchers Isangadighi et al. (2025), Airede & Asibor (2025) demonstrated that peer pressure, together with family dynamics and psychological issues, leads Nigerian youths to use tobacco products, and these factors get intensified through online peer relationships. According to Airede & Asibor (2025) and Ajiboye & Olademo (2025), there exists an imperative need to intensify public awareness campaigns regarding hazardous drug usage among secondary school students since such activities are becoming more frequent. Research findings and theoretical

frameworks create an aggregated framework explaining adolescent social media's effects on behaviour. This research examines the influence of social media on teenagers' moral evolution in Asaba metropolis through an investigation of perception development and narrative framing, observational learning methods, sustaining meaningful human relationships, and meeting psychological needs. Digital exposure requires immediate interventions from media literacy education, parental guidance, and institutional regulations because it creates minimal yet substantial behavioural changes among youth.

3. Methodology

This investigation employed a descriptive-survey design to capture, at scale, how social-media exposure acts as a catalyst for drug abuse, delinquency, and the erosion of moral norms among adolescents in Asaba Metropolis, Delta State. Asaba—administrative capital of the state and seat of Oshimili South LGA—covers 268 km² along the western bank of the River Niger. While the 2006 census recorded 149 603 inhabitants, projected growth of 2.3 % per year places the current population at roughly 204 657.

3.1 Target Population and Sample

The study focused on residents aged 13–19, combining in-school students with their out-of-school peers to reflect the city's full adolescent spectrum. Krejcie & Morgan's sample-size table indicated that 400 respondents would offer adequate statistical power for a population of this magnitude. A multi-stage procedure enhanced representativeness: (i) the metropolis was stratified into urban and peri-urban zones; (ii) youth clusters (schools, faith-based groups, neighbourhood associations) were mapped within each stratum; (iii) clusters were selected at random; and (iv) simple random sampling yielded individual participants.

3.2 Instrument

Data were gathered with the four-part *Teen Social-Media Influence and Morality Scale* (TSMIMS), a 40-item tool measuring (1) demographics, (2) social-media usage patterns, (3) moral-value orientation, and (4) propensity toward drug use or criminal behaviour. Responses were captured on a five-point Likert scale (5 = *Strongly Agree* … 1 = *Strongly Disagree*).

3.3 Validity and Reliability

A panel of experts in Educational Psychology, Sociology, and Criminology (Delta State University, Abraka) reviewed the TSMIMS for face and content validity, refining wording and contextual relevance. A pilot with 40 adolescents in nearby Ogwashi-Uku—chosen for its socio-demographic similarity—produced a Cronbach's α of 0.84, confirming high internal consistency.

3.4 Data Collection and Ethics

Over twenty weeks trained field assistants administered the questionnaire in classrooms, youth centres, and community hubs. Written informed consent (or assent with parental approval for minors) was obtained after the study's aims, confidentiality safeguards, and voluntary-participation rights were explained. Ethical clearance was secured from school principals and the community leadership council.

3.5 Analytical Strategy

SPSS v26 facilitated both descriptive and inferential analyses. Frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations profiled respondents and key variables. Relationships between social-media habits and drug/crime metrics were tested with Chi-square analyses; Pearson's r quantified the strength and direction of associations between exposure intensity and moral-value shifts; one-way ANOVA compared mean scores across age, residential zone, and gender. A significance threshold of $p < 0.05$ guided all statistical interpretations.

By integrating rigorous sampling, a psychometrically sound instrument, and multi-layered statistical testing, this methodology provides a robust platform for understanding the digital drivers of adolescent risk behaviour in Asaba Metropolis.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of the survey are presented in Table 1-10.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	13–15	102	25.6%
	16–18	198	49.7%
	19–21	98	24.6%
Gender	Male	191	48.0%
	Female	199	50.0%
	Prefer not to say	8	2.0%
Educational Level	Junior Secondary	121	30.4%
	Senior Secondary	199	50.0%
	Tertiary/College	78	19.6%
Internet Access	Yes	354	89.0%
	No	44	11.0%

Table 2: Frequency of Exposure to Drug Content on Social Media

Item	1 (Never)	2 (Rarely)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Very Often)
See drug use posts/videos	17 (4.3%)	50 (12.6%)	70 (17.6%)	142 (35.7%)	119 (29.9%)
Celebrities endorse drug use	18 (4.5%)	47 (11.8%)	75 (18.8%)	141 (35.4%)	117 (29.4%)
Received drug-related adverts	24 (6.0%)	46 (11.6%)	73 (18.3%)	138 (34.7%)	117 (29.4%)
Groups/pages sharing drug content	19 (4.8%)	33 (8.3%)	88 (22.1%)	130 (32.7%)	128 (32.2%)

Drug users seen as popular/successful	16 (4.0%)	38 (9.5%)	82 (20.6%)	145 (36.4%)	117 (29.4%)

Table 3: Influence of Social Media Exposure on Drug Abuse

Item	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (U)	4 (A)	5 (SA)
Curiosity to experiment with drugs	41 (10.3%)	42 (10.6%)	62 (15.6%)	143 (35.9%)	110 (27.6%)
Tried substances after seeing online use	44 (11.1%)	37 (9.3%)	57 (14.3%)	158 (39.7%)	102 (25.6%)
Think drug use is cool/socially acceptable	38 (9.5%)	43 (10.8%)	59 (14.8%)	139 (34.9%)	119 (29.9%)
Support banning drug-promoting content on social media	41 (10.3%)	48 (12.1%)	66 (16.6%)	131 (32.9%)	112 (28.1%)

Table 4: Drug Abuse and Criminal Behaviour

Item	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (U)	4 (A)	5 (SA)
Know teens who commit crime after drug use	15 (3.8%)	41 (10.3%)	60 (15.1%)	163 (41.0%)	119 (29.9%)
Drug abuse increases violent behaviour	17 (4.3%)	42 (10.6%)	63 (15.8%)	155 (38.9%)	121 (30.4%)
Cultism/robbery often involves drug use	16 (4.0%)	50 (12.6%)	58 (14.6%)	160 (40.2%)	114 (28.6%)
Drug use linked to sexual/gender-based violence	18 (4.5%)	43 (10.8%)	60 (15.1%)	154 (38.7%)	123 (30.9%)

Table 5: Binary Perceptions on Drug-Crime Relationship and Regulation (n = 398)

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Teenagers who use drugs are more likely to commit crimes	285 (72%)	113 (28%)
Social media increases both drug abuse and criminal behaviour	314 (79%)	84 (21%)
Parents/authorities should monitor teenagers' social media usage	326 (82%)	72 (18%)

Table 6: Chi-Square Test Result

Test	Chi² Statistic	p-value	Significance
Internet Access vs. Social Media Increases Drug Abuse & Crime	1.921	0.166	Not Significant
Exposure Level vs Belief Drug Abuse Leads to Crime	4.209	0.122	Not Significant
Drug Abuse Level vs Belief Drug Abuse Leads to Crime	0.460	0.795	Not Significant
Crime Link Level vs Belief Drug Abuse Leads to Crime	1.982	0.371	Not Significant

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Results

Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Significance
Exposure vs Drug Abuse	-0.016	0.748	Not Significant
Exposure vs Crime Link	0.002	0.961	Not Significant

Table 8: Linear Regression (Predicting Drug Abuse Score)

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	14.827	1.048	14.153	<0.001	Significant
Exposure_Score	-0.014	0.056	-0.257	0.797	Not Significant
Gender_Code	-0.318	0.254	-1.253	0.211	Not Significant

Table 9: Logistic Regression (Predicting Belief that Drug Use Leads to Crime - E1)

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	1.824	1.200	1.520	0.129	Not Significant
Exposure_Score	-0.064	0.049	-1.298	0.194	Not Significant
DrugAbuse_Score	0.034	0.043	0.793	0.428	Not Significant
Gender_Code	0.057	0.222	0.257	0.797	Not Significant
Internet_Code	-0.003	0.403	-0.007	0.994	Not Significant

Table 10: Independent T-Test

Comparison	t-statistic	p-value	Significance
Drug Abuse Score (Male vs Female)	-1.566	0.118	Not Significant

Table 11: One-Way ANOVA

Comparison	F-statistic	p-value	Significance
Drug Abuse Score across Age Groups	0.115	0.891	Not Significant

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 indicates that the respondents' characteristics closely parallel long-standing patterns among Nigerian youth. Almost half of the participants (49.7 %) were aged 16–18 years, with the 13–15 year and 19–21-year groups accounting for 25.6 % and 24.6 %, respectively. Gender representation was nearly even—48.0 % male and 50.0 % female—while 2.0 % declined to disclose their gender. A sizeable majority (89.0 %) reported owning a smartphone or having reliable Internet access, a prerequisite for sustained social-media use. Academically, the sample comprised 50.0 % senior-secondary students, 30.4 % junior-secondary students, and 19.6 % tertiary-level students. Collectively, these demographics point to a cohort that is highly exposed to—and potentially shaped by—digital environments, reinforcing the importance of investigating online behavioural influences in this population (Okoh et al., 2025; Gyane et al., 2025).

4.2 Exposure to Drug Content on Social Media

A large proportion of Nigerian youth encounter drug-related material on social media. In this study, 65.6 % of respondents said they viewed such content regularly. Exposure to celebrities who openly use or endorse drugs (64.8 %) nearly matched the frequency with which participants noticed explicit drug-promotion adverts (64.1 %). Roughly two-thirds (64.9 %) followed pages or groups that circulate drug content, and 66.8 % reported that social-media posts often portray drug users as successful or popular figures. Together, these patterns lend empirical support to social-learning and modelling theories, which posit that repeated exposure normalizes the behaviour being observed (Adindu et al., 2024). Similar results were documented by Eze et al. (2024) in their study of students in south-eastern Nigeria who consume narcotics-related content on Instagram and Snapchat. Such findings underscore the need for stricter oversight of digital content and for robust digital-media-literacy programmes, as chronic exposure can dull adolescents' risk perception and tacitly endorse illicit behaviour.

4.3 Influence of Social Media on Drug Abuse Behaviour

Table 3 suggests a strong perceptual link between social-media exposure and drug-related curiosity or experimentation. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63.5 %) either agreed or strongly agreed that online content had sparked an interest in trying drugs, and 65.3 % reported actually experimenting with substances seen on social platforms. Likewise, 64.8 % believed recreational drug use is socially acceptable—or "cool." Yet the inferential statistics tell a more nuanced story. Correlational analysis (Table 7) revealed no meaningful relationship between overall exposure and drug-abuse scores ($r = –0.016$, $p = 0.748$). Regression testing (Table 8) reinforced this null finding: exposure failed to predict abuse scores ($\beta = –0.014$, $p = 0.797$). These mixed results echo Blahošová et al. (2025), who noted that although adolescents often cite media as an influence, actual consumption behaviour are more powerfully shaped by peer

dynamics and home environments. In short, while young people perceive social media as a catalyst for drug curiosity, the weak statistical linkage underscores the need for holistic prevention strategies that extend beyond simple content restrictions.

4.4 Drug Abuse and Criminal Behaviour

Table 4 shows that respondents overwhelmingly link drug use with criminal activity. Fully 70.9 % said they personally knew teenagers who drifted into crime after taking drugs. Comparable majorities believed substance abuse fuels interpersonal violence (69.3 %), cultism and robbery (68.8 %), and gender-based violence (69.6 %). These perceptions mirror findings by Muhammad et al. (2025), who reported that many Nigerian adolescents view drug consumption as a precursor to crime. Yet inferential statistics complicate the narrative. Correlational analysis detected no meaningful association between online drug-content exposure and endorsement of the drug-crime link ($r = 0.002$, $p = 0.961$; Table 7). Logistic-regression results were likewise nonsignificant for both exposure ($\beta = –0.064$, $p = 0.194$) and personal drug-abuse scores ($\beta = 0.034$, $p = 0.428$) in predicting this belief (Table 9). In short, the conviction that "drugs lead to crime" is widespread but appears largely independent of respondents' digital experiences. Prevention efforts should therefore weave in critical-media-literacy training, helping adolescents distinguish between correlation and causation when interpreting behavioural narratives.

4.5 Perceptions on Drug-Crime Relationship and Regulation

The data in Table 5 demonstrates that people extensively believe drug use affects social media exposure, which leads to criminal behaviour. People in the surveyed group held the belief that drug-using teenagers have greater tendencies to become criminals and that social media plays a significant role in this pattern (72% and 79% respectively). Most 82% backed online supervision of teenage social media platforms by parents or institutions. Recently collected data demonstrates public understanding that digital exposure remains dangerous when left unsupervised. Statistical data reveal no connection between internet access and beliefs about social media's impact on drug and criminal activities ($\chi^2 = 1.921$, $p = 0.166$). Table 6 demonstrates this finding. The data confirms that although trust in media power exists strongly, participants do not base their beliefs on actual internet usage or hardware ownership, as Chiang et al. (2024) found during their investigation of African adolescent Internet activities in various nations. The research findings indicate that public education efforts have successfully altered the public mindset despite weak associations between media exposure and genuine behavioural changes.

4.6 Group Differences and Predictive Modelling

The assessment of group variations revealed slight variations in drug abuse tendencies among male and female participants, as well as different age brackets. The ANOVA test revealed no significant difference between drug abuse scores between males and females because the t value equaled -1.566 while the p value equaled 0.118 (see Table 10). Drug abuse patterns between the three age groups did not show any significant differences according to the one-way ANOVA analysis that produced an F value of 0.115 (p value = 0.891). The research results differ from those presented in Ortolá et al. (2024) because they do not support older male participants displaying higher substance abuse patterns. The increasing media exposure uniformity among different groups might explain these findings because Table 1 shows that 89% of individuals have internet access. The evaluation scores from Exposure Level to Drug Abuse Level and Crime Link Level did not demonstrate statistically meaningful connections to drug-crime belief (Table 6). New intervention models must address present-day online environments because demographic indicators and behavioural markers show decreased predictive power within digital spaces.

4.7 Future Direction

This study yields pivotal insights into how social-media engagement intersects with adolescent drug use and delinquency in Asaba Metropolis; however, it also highlights critical gaps that warrant deeper investigation. Future work should adopt longitudinal designs, tracking cohorts over multiple time points to clarify the cumulative impact of sustained exposure to drug-related content. Such designs will allow scholars to disentangle temporal sequencing—establishing whether digital stimuli precede, accompany, or merely coincide with risky behaviour. Equally important is the examination of psychosocial moderators—peer influence, family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and individual resilience—that may amplify or buffer social-media effects. Comparative studies spanning urban and rural settings, as well as Nigeria's diverse geopolitical zones, could illuminate how cultural context shapes digital habits and substance-use trajectories. Methodologically, mixed-methods approaches are indispensable. In-depth interviews and focus-group discussions can surface the emotional and cognitive drivers that lure teenagers toward drug-themed content online. Finally, rigorous evaluations of school-based digital-literacy and anti-drug curricula are needed to generate evidence-based interventions that educators, policymakers, and caregivers can deploy with confidence.

In short, the present findings lay a foundation; sustained, context-rich, and methodologically diverse research will be essential for building a comprehensive strategy to curb adolescent substance abuse in the digital age.

5. Conclusion

Efforts to curb adolescent substance abuse remain a global priority, yet the will to eliminate the problem often collides with politicized enforcement strategies that prioritize interdiction—arrests, seizures, even armed confrontations with traffickers—over public-health solutions. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, cannabis use and binge drinking among teenagers persist despite drug-education campaigns and under-resourced rehabilitation programmes. The findings of this study show that social-media environments saturated with celebrity endorsements and glamorized depictions of drug use amplify young people's curiosity and normalize risky behaviour, thereby nudging them toward criminal activity. Addressing this digital-age challenge calls for a coordinated, multisectoral approach anchored in prevention, critical literacy, and accountability. Federal and state education ministries, working closely with the NDLEA, should mount sustained, youth-friendly campaigns on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, pairing engaging content with clear anti-drug messaging. At the curricular level, secondary schools need to embed digital-literacy and media-analysis modules that teach students to deconstruct persuasive drug-related imagery and resist peer pressure online. Parents, guardians, and caregivers require structured training that equips them to monitor adolescents' online routines and hold open, informed conversations about digital risks and substance exposure. Community actors—religious leaders, traditional authorities, teachers, and NGOs—can reinforce these efforts through workshops, seminars, and peer-led initiatives that foreground positive role models and cultivate resilience. Creative media—short films, music videos, and influencer-driven campaigns tailored to youthful tastes—should crowd out drug-promoting content, while social-media companies must be held to regulatory standards that compel them to flag, demote, or remove posts targeting minors with illicit drug imagery. Only by weaving together education, family engagement, community mobilization, and platform accountability can Nigeria disrupt the online narratives that glamorize drug use and protect its adolescents from the intertwined threats of addiction and crime.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting and publishing this research. They have no financial or personal relationships that could influence the results or interpretation of this study.

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