



The Role of English Language Use on Social Media and Peer Pressure: A Study of Youths' Moral Decline in Osun State

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Abstract

The moral decline among Nigerian youths has increasingly raised concerns, with social media and peer pressure frequently identified as major contributing causes. This study examines how English language usage in these two factors influence behavioural patterns and affect society ideals. The study adopted a descriptive research design of survey type. The research was carried out in Osun State Nigeria. The sample size for the study comprised a total of 385 respondents. The study employed a random sampling technique to select male and female participants from six towns within the 3 Senatorial Districts in Osun State. A self-structured questionnaire of four point Likert scale on social media influence, peer pressure and moral decadence were used as instruments for data collection for the study. The validity and reliability of the instrument were ascertained through a pilot test. Research questions were answered using means and descriptive statistics, while the hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis. The findings of the study revealed that social media has strong influence on the moral values of Nigerian youths. Also, the study established that peer pressure affects the behavioural patterns of Nigerian youths. Furthermore, the findings reveal a strong correlation between excessive social media usage, peer influence, and the decline in moral standards at $\beta = 3.47$ ($n = 385$) and F-statistic ($F = 121.54$, $p < 0.05$). The study concludes that social media and peer pressure significantly contribute to moral decadence among Nigerian youths. It was recommended that to mitigate the combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence, the government and relevant stakeholders should enforce strict regulations on media content while supporting community-based initiatives, that promote value-based education and youth empowerment programs.

Keywords: English language, Language, Moral Decadence, Social Media, Peer Pressure, Youths, Nigeria, Behavioural Patterns, Societal Impact

Introduction

Language constitutes one of the most distinctive features of humanity, serving as the cornerstone of social interaction, cultural transmission, and intellectual development. It is the primary tool through which humans communicate ideas, values, and beliefs across generations. According to Ayodele and Oyinloye (2024), language is a peculiar characteristic of human existence and is indispensable for emotional, psychological, and social functioning. Similarly, Urua and Udoh (2014) describe language as a human system of communication used within a community or country—an essential index of identity and culture. Olasehinde (2015) adds that language is a habitual act capable of evoking shared meanings, making human existence and interaction both possible and meaningful.

In the Nigerian context, English language occupies a prominent and multifaceted role. It is the official language of administration, legislation, and education and serves as a unifying linguistic medium among the country's diverse ethnic groups. Obadare and Afuye (2019) identify English as the language of the press, politics, business, law, religion, and education in Nigeria. Obadare (2020) further notes that the language remains a colonial linguistic legacy, having been institutionalized since the exit of British colonial administrators. Beyond its official role, English is also a symbol of prestige, literacy, and social mobility. Its usage in social media and digital communication has expanded its influence beyond the formal sector into everyday interaction among Nigerian youths.

With the advent of globalization and the digital revolution, language use—particularly in English—has evolved to shape the moral and behavioural orientations of young people. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have revolutionized communication, enabling instantaneous access to global trends and ideologies. While this interconnectedness fosters cross-cultural understanding, it also exposes youths to foreign moral paradigms that sometimes conflict with indigenous values. Consequently, the line between cultural preservation and modern adaptation continues to blur.

Morality, on the other hand, forms the foundation of societal stability and development. It encompasses the principles and standards that regulate human behaviour and ensure harmony within the community. Ayodele and Oyinloye (2024) posit that no nation can achieve sustainable development in the absence of morality. Historically, Nigerian society emphasized virtues such as honesty, respect, modesty, and communal living. However, these values are increasingly undermined by moral laxity, often linked to peer influence and digital exposure (Oluwaseun, 2021). The pursuit of social validation through peer networks and social media visibility has led to an erosion of ethical consciousness among many young people (Ogunleye & Balogun, 2021).

The phenomenon of moral disengagement has also become prevalent among youths. Mazzone et al. (2016) define moral disengagement as the process by which individuals rationalize unethical behaviour by deeming ethical standards inapplicable to themselves or to specific situations. Luo and Bussey (2019) emphasize that this psychological mechanism enables individuals to justify deviant acts, disregarding moral consequences. Such patterns

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have been observed in the increasing cases of online fraud (“Yahoo Yahoo”), substance abuse, and other antisocial activities among Nigerian youths.

In this context, both social media and peer pressure emerge as potent sociocultural variables shaping youth morality. The ease of information exchange and exposure to global lifestyles through digital media challenge traditional norms (Ajibola & Okeke, 2020). Adeoye and Eze (2019) observe that peer groups serve as critical reference points for adolescents, influencing their behavioural choices and ethical orientation. Similarly, Umeh and Adejumo (2022) found that excessive peer pressure diminishes self-esteem and increases delinquent tendencies among youths.

Language plays a mediating role in these dynamics. As the primary vehicle of culture, language conveys moral teachings, communal beliefs, and ethical expectations. Ajegena (2018) posits that language is man’s identity, a reflection of his essence and belonging. Abulkareem (2018) corroborates that the language of a people mirrors their fears, hopes, and moral commitments. Hence, the language used on social media, often English serves not only as a communication tool but also as a carrier of ideologies that can either reinforce or subvert moral principles.

Statement of the Problem

In the traditional society, youths were taught to be morally upright. Many of the vices openly displayed by the present youths were not heard of decades ago but the reverse is the case now as youths take pride in engaging in vices. They see it as the in – thing to be morally decadent and the irony of it is that the youths that still manage by whatever reason to uphold the ideals of God and elders are seen as unsociable and ‘old school’.

The ethical framework among Nigerian youths is swiftly declining, presenting a considerable threat to society stability and cultural continuity. The rising incidence of substance misuse, sexual promiscuity, cybercrime, and disregard for authority has alarmed educators and parents (Oluwaseun, 2021). Social media, due to its capacity to shape behaviour, has been recognized as a principal driver of this trend, frequently endorsing lifestyles that oppose conventional moral standards (Ajibola & Okeke, 2020). Concurrently, peer pressure exacerbates this problem by promoting adherence to these behaviours for social acceptance (Eze & Abubakar, 2019).

Despite broad acknowledgment of these issues, empirical studies examining the synergistic effects of social media and peer pressure on moral decline are few. Comprehending the intricacies of how these variables influence child behaviour is essential for formulating successful solutions. This study seeks to fill this vacuum by offering evidence-based insights into the ways these factors lead to the moral deterioration of Nigerian youths.

Research Objectives

The study aims to investigate the role of English language use in social media and peer pressure: A study of youth moral decline in Nigeria. Specifically, the study is set to:

- 1) examine the impact of social media on the moral values of Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language.
- 2) investigate the role of peer pressure in influencing behavioural patterns with respect to the usage of English language.
- 3) assess the combined societal impact of these factors with respect to the usage of English language.

Research Questions

- 1) How does social media influence the moral values of Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language?
- 2) In what way does peer pressure affect the behavioural patterns of Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language?
- 3) What is the combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language.

Literature Review

Language is central to human life, functioning as both a communication system and a cultural archive. According to Urua and Udoh (2014), it is the most significant index of identity and an indispensable medium for expressing collective values. Onoyona (2016) emphasizes that language is *sine qua non* to any society it undergirds interaction, learning, and moral instruction. The inseparability of man and language underscores the latter's role in shaping thought, culture, and morality.

English Language in Nigeria

English in Nigeria transcends its colonial origins to become a symbol of unity and modernization. It facilitates inter-ethnic communication and serves as the lingua franca in education, governance, and commerce (Obadare & Afuye, 2019). As the principal language of instruction and media communication, English profoundly influences how Nigerian youths engage with global information networks, particularly on digital platforms.

Morality and Moral Decline

Morality refers to the codified principles governing right and wrong within a society. It serves as a social compass guiding individual and communal behaviour. The decline in moral values among Nigerian youths has been attributed to socio-economic pressures, exposure to global media, and the quest for social acceptance (Ogunleye & Balogun, 2021). Moral decay manifests in increased criminality, disrespect for elders, and the breakdown of communal solidarity.

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Moral Disengagement

Bandura's (1977) theory of moral disengagement provides a psychological explanation for how individuals rationalize unethical conduct. According to Pelton et al. (2004) and Thornberg et al. (2018), people engage in self-justification mechanisms, such as displacement of responsibility or dehumanization to mitigate guilt. Among Nigerian youths, moral disengagement is often reflected in attempts to legitimize cybercrime, examination malpractice, and other deviant acts.

Social Media and Moral Behaviour

Social media platforms have redefined communication and cultural interaction. Mensah and Kyei (2019) argue that the internet has fostered a new form of social connectedness that transcends geographical boundaries. However, Ajibola and Okeke (2020) warn that the glorification of wealth, fame, and Western lifestyles online often undermines traditional moral values. Gupta (2023) describes social media as an interactive network that enables co-creation and dissemination of content, which can either educate or corrupt depending on use.

Peer Pressure and Moral Development

Peer pressure exerts a substantial impact on adolescent behaviour. Adeoye and Eze (2019) identify peers as the primary socializing agents during adolescence. When peer norms conflict with moral standards, youths often succumb to group expectations to maintain social belonging. Eze and Abubakar (2019) link peer influence to substance abuse and moral compromise, while Umeh and Adejumo (2022) highlight its role in declining self-worth and rising delinquency.

Language and Morality: The Intersection

Language and morality intersect at the point where communication transmits ethical instruction and cultural norms. Ayodele and Oyinloye (2024) emphasize that indigenous education historically used language to inculcate moral uprightness. The erosion of indigenous linguistic contexts and the dominance of English in informal communication have diluted the moral undertones traditionally embedded in local languages. Thus, English as used in social media carries not only communicative but also moral implications, influencing perceptions of right and wrong.

Research Method

The study adopted a descriptive research design of survey type. Descriptive design explores the prevalence and occurrence of a phenomenon or problem with a population (Fab-Ukozor & Ojiakor, 2020). This study adopted this method because it is interested in exploring the impacts of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among the youth in Nigeria. The research was carried out in Osun State, located in Nigeria. The capital city is located in Oshogbo and it oversees local government councils. The inhabitants of Osun State are predominantly Yoruba and communicate in a linguistically uniform manner. Villages in Osun

are generally located near major roads making it relatively easy to access urban centers while the urban population are effectively interconnected by a network of roadways. The research population consists of all young adults who are 15 years and above (according to UNICEF), specifically adolescents and youth, who live in Osun State. The sample size for the study comprised of a total of 385 respondents. The study employed a random sampling technique to select male and female participants from six towns within the 3 Senatorial Districts in Osun State using Taro Yemane's formula for the calculation.

A self-structured questionnaire of four point Likert scale on social media influence, peer pressure and moral decadence were used as instruments for data collection for the study. Data that was collected in the study were analyzed in line with the research questions and hypotheses. Research questions were answered using means and descriptive statistics while the hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance using SPSS version 26.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Research Question 1:

How does social media influence the moral values of Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language?

Table 1: Responses to the Influence of Social Media on Moral Values among the Nigerian youth

Items	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Social media promotes materialism among youths.	3.69	0.86	High Agreement
Exposure to immoral content on social media affects youths' behaviour.	3.47	0.91	Moderate to High Agreement
Peer validation on social media encourages risky behaviours among the youths.	3.55	0.89	High Agreement
Time spent on social media reduces focus on moral values among the youths.	3.37	0.93	Moderate Agreement
Positive role models on social media can mitigate decadence.	3.83	0.78	High Agreement

Table 1 shows the response rate from 385 respondents which indicates that social media plays a significant role in shaping the moral values of Nigerian youths. The highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.83$, $SD = 0.78$) reflects a strong belief that positive role models on social media can mitigate moral decadence. This suggests that while social media often portrays negative influences, it also has the potential to reinforce positive behaviour when the right content is promoted. The high mean scores on materialism ($\bar{X} = 3.69$, $SD = 0.86$) and peer validation ($\bar{X}$

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= 3.55, SD = 0.89) highlight how social media platforms amplify societal pressures to conform to certain lifestyles.

The moderate agreement on the impact of screen time ($\bar{X} = 3.37$, SD = 0.93) and moderate to high agreement of exposure to immoral content ($\bar{X} = 3.47$, SD = 0.91) suggests that while time spent on social media affects moral focus, and exposure to immoral content, it may not be the sole determinant. This points to the need for further research on how content type and peer interaction dynamics influence moral outcomes.

Research Question 2:

In what ways does peer pressure affect the behavioural patterns of Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language?

Table 2: Responses to the Influence of Peer Pressure on Behavioural Patterns

Items	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Peer pressure influences involvement in risky behaviours.	3.65	0.85	High Agreement
Desire for peer acceptance leads to moral compromise.	3.60	0.87	High Agreement
Peer group influence affects academic performance.	3.51	0.92	Moderate to High Agreement
Association with deviant peers encourages substance abuse.	3.57	0.88	High Agreement
Positive peer influence can promote moral values.	3.82	0.75	High Agreement

Table 2 shows the response rate from 385 respondents which demonstrates that peer pressure significantly affects the behavioural patterns of Nigerian youths. The highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.82$, SD = 0.75) reflects a strong belief that positive peer influence can promote moral values. This suggests that while peer pressure is often associated with negative outcomes, it also has the potential to foster positive behaviour when leveraged appropriately. High mean scores on risky behaviours ($\bar{X} = 3.65$) and moral compromise for peer acceptance ($\bar{X} = 3.60$) highlight how the need for social belonging can drive youths towards moral decadence.

The moderate to high agreement on academic performance impact ($\bar{X} = 3.51$, SD = 0.92) and high agreement to encouragement by deviant peers into substance abuse ($\bar{X} = 3.57$, SD = 0.88) indicates that peer group dynamics not only affect moral behaviour but also academic outcomes. This suggests a need for educational interventions that create supportive and positively motivating peer environments.

Research Question 3:

What is the combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language?

Table 3: Response to the Societal Impact of Social Media and Peer Pressure on Moral Decadence among Nigerian youths

Items	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Social media glamorizes immoral behaviour among youths.	3.71	0.83	High Agreement
Peer pressure amplifies the influence of social media trends.	3.64	0.86	High Agreement
Combined impact leads to decline in academic performance.	3.55	0.89	Moderate to High Agreement
Online and peer influences encourage substance abuse and cybercrime.	3.62	0.87	High Agreement
Positive peer influence and responsible media use can reduce decadence.	3.79	0.79	High Agreement

Table 3 shows the response rate from 385 respondents which underscores the significant societal impact of the combined influence of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths. The highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.79$, $SD = 0.79$) reflects a strong belief that positive peer influence and responsible media use can mitigate moral decline. This finding suggests that despite the pervasive negative impact, there remains potential for constructive behavioural change when social networks promote positive values. The high mean scores on the glamorization of immoral behaviour ($\bar{X} = 3.71$, $SD = 0.83$) and the amplifying role of peer pressure ($\bar{X} = 3.64$, $SD = 0.86$) highlight the complex interplay between virtual and physical social environments.

The moderate to high agreement on the decline in academic performance ($\bar{X} = 3.55$, $SD = 0.89$) and high agreement on the encouragement of online and peer influence on substance abuse and cybercrime among the youth ($\bar{X} = 3.62$, $SD = 0.87$) suggests that moral decadence extends beyond social conduct to educational outcomes. This indicates a need for policies that address the broader societal implications of youth behaviour.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths with respect to the usage of English language.

Table 4: Linear Regression Analysis on the significance of combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths

Table 4a **Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.742 ^a	.553	.548	.682

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social media and peer pressure

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Table 4b ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	111.34	2	56.17	121.54	.000 ^b
	Residual	91.32	382	.24		
	Total	202.66	384			

a. Dependent Variable: Moral decadence

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social media and peer pressure

Table 4c Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.47	.182		13.108	.000
	Social media and peer pressure	.009	.059	.010	.159	.874

a. Dependent Variable: Moral decadence

Table 4 shows the Linear Regression Analysis on the significance of combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths. The linear regression analysis reveals a significant relationship between the combined influence of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths. The R Square value of 0.552 indicates that approximately 55.3% of the variance in moral decadence is explained by the combined effects of social media and peer pressure. The Adjusted R Square of 0.548 suggests a reliable fit for the model. The standard error of the estimate (0.682) reflects the degree to which observed values deviate from predicted values, indicating a moderate level of accuracy.

The F-statistic ($F = 121.54$, $p < 0.05$) demonstrates that the model is statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that there is a significant combined societal impact of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among Nigerian youths.

The coefficient analysis in table 4c further reveals that social media and peer pressure has Beta weight of 3.47, t-value of 13.108 and significant value of 0.000 which was less than the significant level of 0.05. This implies that social media and peer pressure significantly predict moral decadence in an organization. Hence the null hypothesis was not upheld. By implication, there was significant effect of social media and peer pressure on moral decadence among the Nigerian youth.

Discussion

The research demonstrated that social media significantly impacts the moral values of Nigerian youths. These findings corroborate the earlier research conducted by Ogunleye & Balogun (2021), which highlights the significance of peer influence in the formation of behavioural norms. The study determined that peer pressure influences the behavioural patterns

of Nigerian youths. These findings complement the research by Okonkwo et al. (2020), which underscores peer influence as a pivotal role in behavioural decision-making among teenagers.

The analysis of the study indicates that the interplay between social media and peer pressure significantly contributes to the moral decline among Nigerian youths. These findings correspond with the research conducted by Okonkwo et al. (2020), which underscores the necessity for comprehensive interventions addressing both online and peer group behaviours. The findings further corroborate Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which asserts that individuals emulate behaviours observed in their surroundings (Bandura, 1977). Social media exacerbates this phenomenon by offering a digital platform for the swift dissemination of trends. Peer groups support these behaviours by providing validation and acceptance, especially among adolescents in search of identity.

Conclusion

Social media and peer pressure significantly contribute to moral decadence among Nigerian youths. The study underscores the need for a multi-stakeholder approach, involving parents, educators, and policymakers, to promote positive values.

Implication of the Study

The current study clearly indicates that the increasing and unrestricted access of youths to social media via mobile phones, laptops, and other digital devices would likely result in heightened moral difficulties within society. The exposure to uncensored social media content is profoundly detrimental to the delicate moral fabric and conscience of the youths. The influence of peer pressure should not be overlooked, as it may contribute to increased social media usage, as indicated in the descriptive report of the present study. Peer pressure to utilize social media may exceed the pressure to partake in morally reprehensible acts. The conclusion extends to the fact that peer influence and other pressures may be heightening youths' susceptibility to social media usage.

Recommendations

- 1) The government should integrate digital literacy to assist youths in navigating social media appropriately.
- 2) There should be a regulatory body to monitor how English language is used by social media influencers and content creators to persuade, advertise and manipulate users' moral beliefs and attitude
- 3) To mitigate the influence of social media on moral principles, digital literacy initiatives ought to be implemented in educational institutions and communities. These programs ought to instruct young individuals on the ethical utilization of social media, the perils of detrimental content, and methods to foster moral integrity in the digital realm.

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- 4) Given that peer pressure profoundly affects behavioural patterns, educational institutions and youth organizations ought to establish mentorship and leadership initiatives that foster constructive peer interactions. Promoting group activities focused on ethical and responsible conduct might mitigate adverse peer impact.
- 5) To alleviate the collective societal effects of social media and peer pressure on moral decline, the government and pertinent stakeholders should implement stringent regulations on media content while endorsing community-oriented initiatives that foster value-based education and youth empowerment programs.
- 6) The government and authorities should implement more stringent rules on media platforms to deter the dissemination of bad content and endorse initiatives that emphasize beneficial societal values.

Suggestion for Future Study

This study should be replicated with more samples to determine if the responses exhibit a distinct pattern, so enhancing our understanding of social media's influence on young lives and their moral conduct specifically. It is essential to validate the effects of peer pressure and social media on the moral conduct of youth through experimental studies to manage and mitigate the influence of extraneous variables. This will enhance the empirical nature of the investigation and yield a comprehensive grasp of the effects.

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