

## **SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND ESCAPISM TENDENCIES OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS IN UYO EDUCATION ZONE.**

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### **Abstract**

*The study determined the relationship between social media engagement and escapism tendencies of adolescent students in Uyo Education Zone. Three research questions and hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The population of the study comprised all the 9,371 SS2 students enrolled in the 65 private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 500 SS 2 students through the hat and draw method. Two instruments, the Escapism Scale, ES and the Social Media Engagement Scale, SMES, were used to collect data for the study. Data generated were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) for answering the research questions and analysing the hypotheses, tested at .05 probability level. Findings of the study showed that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between Twitter engagement, Facebook engagement, Instagram engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools Uyo Education Zone. The researchers recommended among others that learners' use of social media as a recreational platform during school hours should be prohibited by school administrators and parents should regulate the social media use of their teenage children by strictly monitoring their level of social media engagement in order to enhance their time-management ability.*

### **Introduction**

When an individual is faced with a troubling situation, a stressful event, or an unpleasant reality, there is always a tendency to smother this feeling in a bid to protect the said individual from the tension necessitated by any these unpleasant realities. In other words, people tend to escape from reality when they experience anxiety, tension or frustration in any activity. This escape from reality known as escapism simply means a tendency to withdraw from unpleasant realities. It is a complex phenomenon that involves some sort of motivated behaviour designed at suppressing distressing thoughts and painful experiences (Hastall, 2017). Cohen (2010) defined escapism as

the process of escaping from the pressures of one's immediate realities in search of more fulfilling experiences in other activities. In practical terms, a learner who drifts away from his Mathematics homework and joins his peers in a game of football has exhibited escapism. The child readily dumps the stressful activity in pursuit of a more gratifying exercise.

Views on escapism differ significantly amongst experts, teachers, psychologists and counsellors. While some people view it as a healthy way of coping with stress and anxiety, others see escapism as an unhealthy approach that stems from denial. Ranard (2017) pointing out the importance of escapism in an individual's mental health tried to distinguish it from avoidance. While escapism allows for a temporary disengagement from a stressor, avoidance involves entirely suppressing or ignoring the problematic stimulus. Ranard (2017) also intimated that escapism allows an individual's brain to take a break or reboot and reenergizes one for the task ahead.

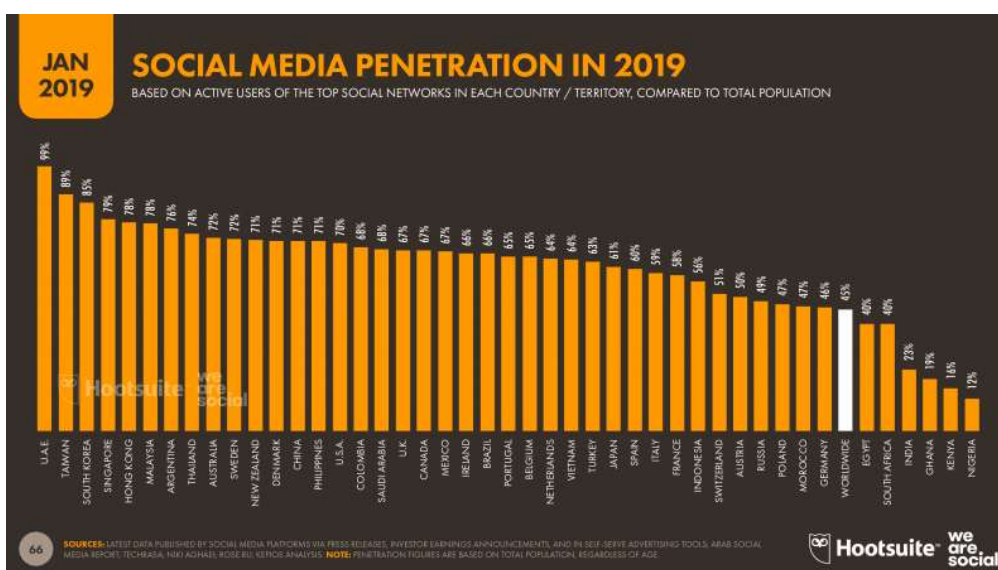
Escapism is motivated by the need to cope with unpleasant realities. While coping is seen as pivotal to adjustment, the particular strategy an individual chooses as a coping mechanism, or the intensity of use of a particular strategy could lead to long-term problems. Escapism has been found to lead to excessive online gaming, drug abuse and other addictive behaviours, and in some cases, gambling (Kardefelt-Winter, 2014; Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2018). Also, it has been found that in a bid to distract one from unpleasant experiences, an individual, in the pursuit of fantasy provided by escapist behaviour could become addicted or entirely dependent on another activity, in such a way that it hinders the said individual's optimal functioning.

In same vein, Stenseng, Rise and Kraft (2012) pointed out that when an individual is engaged in an activity, in order to escape from another activity, the individual experiences absorption in the task, temporary dissociation, and reduced self-evaluation. These affect time management, alters an individual's goal-orientation, hinder self-regulation and negatively affects learning (Ledgerwood & Petry, 2006; Cury, Elliot, Sarrazin, Fonseca & Rufo, 2002).

Adolescents engage in various activities for recreational purposes. Watching movies, playing computer games, playing cards, Ludo and Chess are some of the common ways young people disengage from life's daily hassles. With the steady rise in use of technology in the past decade, the trend has shifted. Social media is currently the most engaging agent of socialization. Over 3.4 billion people are connected to one social media platform or more, out of the 4.38 billion people who have access to the internet (Similarweb, 2019).



(Source: Similarweb, 2019:pp21)



(Source: Similarweb, 2019: pp17)

From the above diagrams, it could be surmised that Nigerians have a strong social media presence. In Nigeria alone, over 31 million people have active presence and the figure is expected to increase to 40 million in 2023 (Statista, nd). Interestingly, Nigerian adolescents are the second most active group on social media in Africa, just behind Egypt. Aondowase and McCarty

(2017) claimed that over 13 million teenagers in Nigeria have access to social media platforms.

There are various social media platforms available to adolescent learners. These include Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, 2go, IMO, Badoo, Reddit and Instagram. These social media brands are mostly designed for users to exchange and access pictures, chat, watch videos and disseminate information. However, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the most popular platforms among young users (Ajike & Nwakoby, 2016).



(Source: Similarweb, 2019: pp13)

Twitter is a very popular social media application among teenagers in Nigeria. The young learners do not only use this social media platform for recreational purposes, they also use it for learning. Bista (2015) found that Twitter also serves as a pedagogical tool that enhances learning opportunities in the classroom. As a recreational tool, twitter is an ideal social media app. It allows users to exchange messages (not more than 140 characters), share information by “re-tweeting”, acquire information from various sources, and allow individuals to monitor the social media presence of their role models and celebrities. However, the lack of censorship and wide access it has granted users have led to suggestions that young learners’ excessive engagement could lead to the loss of a sense of purpose, deviance, risky sexual behaviour, living a life of fantasy, and increased loss of academic motivation (Maity, Chakraborty, Goyal & Mukherjee, 2018; Nagaddya, Kiconco, Komuhangi, Akugizibwe & Atuhairwe, 2017; Lanre-Babalola, 2018).

Facebook is the most popular social media forum among adolescents. This app allows for users to connect with family and friends. They also use Facebook as a medium to interact with “virtual” friends from across the globe. Facebook also give users access to blogs, pages and groups which are created to entertain, engage and inform. The period of adolescence is marked by the desire to explore. Thus, young learners tend to undertake adventurous ventures for thrilling effects (Sanbrock, 2010; Onyejiaku & Onyejiaku, 2011). In the course of engaging in constant Facebook surfing, young learners may find themselves “addicted to the fun and thrills associated with this social media platform. In a study carried out by Khan and Ahmed (2018), it was found that students who spent a lot of time on Facebook score less grades than those that spend less time on Facebook. Excessive Facebook engagement alters a student’s daily routine and leaves him with less time for studies. The increased use of Facebook amongst young individuals have also been found to trigger mental health problems and hinder communication between excessive users and their peers, low self-esteem, depression and mood swings are some of the conditions associated with young people’s excessive Facebook use (Mamun & Griffiths, 2019; Bhachnio, Przepiorka & Pantic, 2016).

Instagram is another Social Networking Site (SNS) that has gained wide acceptance among young people. Though it is not as popular as Facebook, it remains a very common application in Nigeria. SNS activities are classified into three categories, browsing, through content, posting content and directed communication (liking posted content) (Burke, Kraut & Marlow, 2011). Instagram falls under the third category. Instagram allows users to share photos and videos with family, friends and fans. It also allows people to keep an audience who “follow” their activities online. Feedback is generated from the number of “likes” and “follows” one gets, as well as the amount of comments generated by a user’s post. There is always some sort of danger attached to the use of Instagram by teenagers. The need to frequently check for recent pictures, videos and posts from celebrities have been found to induce hyperactivity and generally inhibit psycho-social adjustment (Barry, Sidoti, Briggs, Reiter & Lindsey, 2017). Moreso, adolescents may struggle to reconcile the incongruence between the fantasies associated with active Instagram engagement and the realities of their real lives.

Higgins (1998) provided a viable theoretical framework for this study. The theorist suggested that human behaviour is essentially motivated by the hedonic principle of embracing pleasure and avoiding pain. In Regulation Focus Theory, Higgins (1998) postulated that there is a marked difference between promotion focus and prevention focus. While promotion focus refers to the pursuit of goals that would enhance the individual’s life, prevention

focus involves vigilance and restraint exhibited by the individual in order to shield him from negative outcomes.

Escapist engagement is motivated by both promotion focus and prevention focus. While an adolescent learner could embrace social media to acquire skills that could be of use to him in future, another could engage in the same activity in order to suppress the painful reality of scoring low grades in his examination. Using the same social media, two different learners could exhibit promotion focus and prevention focus, respectively.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Literature has shown a tremendous rise in the rate of usage among adolescents. While social media platforms have been found to be of some benefits, various vices including cyber crime, pornography, cyber bullying, social media addiction, and poor academic engagement have been associated with high social media engagement. Young learners face a lot of stress in their daily lives. The adolescent learner strives to adjust in both his academic and social life. When the learner feels overwhelmed by daily stressors, they mostly seek to adopt strategies that help them cope with the distressing situations. These coping strategies are possible ways of escaping from the harsh realities of their daily lives. Although researchers have shown that social media engagement has pros and cons, the researchers are not certain that relationship exists between social media engagement and students' escapism behaviours. Hence, the thrust of this paper is to find out if there is any relationship between adolescents' social media engagement and their escapist tendencies.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were answered in the course of the study.

1. What is the relationship between Twitter engagement and the escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone?
2. What is the relationship between Facebook engagement and the escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone?
3. What is the relationship between Instagram engagement and the escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone?

## **Hypotheses**

The following null hypothesis postulated to further guide the study were tested at 0.05 probability level.

1. There is no significant relationship between Twitter engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.
2. There is no significant relationship between Facebook engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.
3. There is no significant relationship between Instagram engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.

## **Research Method**

### **Design of the Study**

The design used for this study was a correlational research design. This involves studying the relationship that exists between the independent and the dependent variables.

### **Population of the Study**

The population for the study consists of 9,371 SS 2 students enrolled in all the 65 private schools in Uyo Education Zone. This zone is made up of 4 Local Government Areas; Uyo, Nsit-Atai, Uruan and Ibesikpo-Asutan (Source: Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education, 2019).

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample for this study consists of 520 SS 2 students drawn from the study area. Multi-stage sampling strategy was used in selecting the sample for the study. At the first stage, the 4 local government areas in Uyo Education Zone were selected. In the selected local government areas, a proportion of 5% of secondary schools in each of the selected local government was selected, which gives a total of 13 schools.. From each school, 40 students were selected at random using the hat and draw method. Consequently, 520 students were selected for the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The instruments used for this study were an adapted version of the Escapism Scale (ES) developed by Stenseng et al. (2012) and the Social Media Engagement Scale adapted from the Social Media Addiction Questionnaire developed by Sahin (2018). These instruments were adapted to

reflect our socio-cultural peculiarities. In addition to that, the instruments were adapted to reduce the number of items in the original questionnaires. The Escapism Scale has two sections A and B. Section A contains respondents' personal information, while Section B contains 10 items to measure students' escapism tendencies. The items were scored on a 4 point scale. Negative items were scored on a scale of 1,2,3,4 for SA,A,D,SD while Positive items were scored on a scale of 4,2,3,1. The Social Media Engagement Scale contains 10 items and was scored on a 4 point scale of SA, A, D, and SD.

### **Validation of the Instrument**

The adapted instruments were given out to three experts, one Educational Psychology and two Educational Evaluation experts in the University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The criticisms, comments and other suggestions were incorporated into the final instruments administered.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

In order to ascertain the reliability of the two instruments, 50 copies, each, of the questionnaires were administered to 50 students who did not take part in the actual study. Using their response scores, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients were computed. Reliability coefficient values of .83 and .81 were realized for the Escapism Scale and the Social Media Engagement Scale, respectively. These high values made the researchers consider the instruments adequate for the study.

### **Procedure for Data Collection**

520 questionnaires were distributed, while 500 of the instruments were successfully retrieved from the respondents. These instruments were administered personally by the researchers, aided by two research assistants who are conversant with the rigours of data collection in research.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Data collected for this study were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.5 level of significance.

The decision rule was guided by the suggestions of Evans (1996) that the strength and direction of the relationship for the value of  $r$  is:

- |                 |                              |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| $\pm .10 - .19$ | Very weak relationship       |
| $\pm .20 - .39$ | Weak relationship            |
| $\pm .40 - .59$ | Moderately weak relationship |

± .60 - .79	Strong relationship
± .80 – 1.0	Very strong relationship
- 1.0	Perfect negative relationship
0	No relationship
+ 1	Perfect relationship

## Results

**Research Question One:** What is the relationship between Twitter engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone?

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant relationship between twitter engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Twitter Engagement and Escapism Tendencies**

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r.crit	Remark
Twitter engagement	11171	116117	220376	.75	.196	Strong positive relationship
Escapism tendencies	14066	101594				

**Significant at .05 level; critical r = .196; n = 500; df = 498.**

Table 1 showed a calculated r – value of .75 and a critical r-value of .196 at .05 level of significance and 498 degrees of freedom. In answer to Research Question One from the decision rule, the r-value shows a strong positive relationship between Twitter engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone This implies that there is a strong positive relationship between Twitter engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. On testing Hypothesis One, the calculated r-value of .75 is greater than the critical r-value of .196.

Therefore the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between Twitter engagement and escapism tendencies is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This implies that twitter engagement and escapism tendencies are significantly related.

**Research Question Two:** What is the relationship between Facebook engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone?

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between Facebook engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.

**Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Facebook Engagement and Escapism Tendencies**

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r.crit	Remark
Facebook engagement	13602	140222	145733	.88	.196	Very strong positive relationship
Escapism tendency	14066	101594				

**Significant at .05 level; critical r = .196; n = 500; df = 498.**

Table 2 showed a calculated r – value of .88 and a critical r-value of .196 at .05 level of significance and 498 degrees of freedom. In answer to Research Question Two from the decision rule, the r-value shows a very strong positive relationship between Facebook engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone This implies that there is a very strong positive relationship between Facebook engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. On testing Hypothesis Two, the calculated r-value of .88 is greater than the critical r-value of .196.

Therefore the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between Facebook engagement and escapism tendencies is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This implies that Twitter engagement has a significant relationship with the escapism tendencies are significantly related.

**Research Question Three:** What is the relationship between Instagram engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone?

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant relationship between Instagram engagement and escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.

**Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Instagram Engagement and Escapism Tendencies**

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r.crit	Remark
Instagram engagement	11795	104621	204261	.73	.196	Strong positive relationship
Escapism tendencies	14066	101594				

**Significant at .05 level; critical r = .196; n = 500; df = 498.**

Table 3 revealed a calculated r – value of .73 and a critical value of .196 at .05 level of significance and 498 degrees of freedom. The result of Research Question Three implies that using Instagram has a strong positive relationship with the escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. The result from testing Hypothesis Three revealed that the r-value .73 is greater than the critical value .196. Thus, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between Instagram engagement and the escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This implies that there is significant relationship between Instagram engagement and the escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that social media engagement has a significant relationship with the escapism tendencies of SS 2 students in private secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. This finding is in consonance with the finding of Ledgerwood and Petry (2006) who found that individuals who are addicted to social media often lose track of time and may struggle to carry out other tasks.

The finding also showed that Facebook engagement is significantly related to escapism tendencies. This is supported by Khan and Ahmed (2018) who found that students who spend more time on facebook perform worse than their peers in school and exhibit less academic engagement than students who spend less or no time in school. Also, Hamon (2017) found that

adolescents who spend 53 hours and above on social media sites exhibit avoidance, as a coping mechanism, rather than surmount the problems they face at school, they tend to suppress them by resorting to a utopian social media paradise. This result also amplifies the views that the endless entertainment offered by social media platforms become a more engaging activity to the learner who sees social media virtual interactions as an easy way out of the stressful experiences that abound in the school environment (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2015; Boahene, Fang & Sampong, 2019 )

The finding also revealed that Instagram engagement is significantly related to escapism tendencies of adolescents. The finding corroborates with the finding of McNicol and Thorsteinsen (2017) who found a positive correlation between internet addiction and maladaptive coping of adolescents. This implies that when adolescents become overwhelmed by stringent academic or socio-emotional demands, they resort to intense social media use as a coping strategy. Instagram offers a variety of multi-media options that can be extremely engaging and addictive. Jothi, Neelamalar and Prasad (2011) implied that social media sites like Instagram offers myriads of opportunities to creative minds that are relentless in their efforts to provide premium entertainment for the users. For the adolescent learner, this could pose serious problems. Santrock (2016) asserted that teenagers are vulnerable to social media addiction as they seek for coping strategies that helps them grapple with the “storm and stress” that is experienced during adolescence.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that social media engagement of adolescent students encourages escapism among young learners.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this premises, the researchers make the following recommendations.

Parents should regulate their children’s social media use. Effort must be made to ensure that the adolescent child imbibes time-management ability. This is vital for them if they are to attain adjustment in all facets of their adolescent phase.

The school authority should ensure that recreational use of social media during school hours is prohibited. This would go a long way in curbing the high rate of adolescent’s social media engagement.

School counsellors have to remain steadfast in their duties as a source of support to the adolescent learner. There is cogent need for emphasis on

providing therapeutic help to learners with problematic social media use or addiction.

Social Network Sites also have a role to play. They should censor materials on their platforms. Appropriate programmes and brands that promote mental health and psycho-social wellbeing of the adolescents should be provided for the young people.

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