



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## SOCIAL MEDIA, CELEBRITY SINGLE PARENTHOOD AND THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN UMUAHIA, ABIA STATE NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study examined the emerging trend of celebrity single parenthood and its effects on the young people in Umuahia using the social media platform. The study adopted the survey research method in order to collect relevant data, while it was also anchored on two theoretical frameworks namely; the modeling theory of communication and media ecology theory. The study drew a sample size of two hundred and fifty (250) respondents from Umuahia metropolis in Abia state and surveyed young people between the ages of 15 and 27. The instruments used for gathering the data were questionnaire and interviews. Findings from the study showed that the phenomenon of celebrity single parenthood has been on the increase in Nigeria, and are constantly portrayed and showcased on the social media. On the other hand, the young people are impressionable and therefore assimilate and emulate the lifestyles projected on the social media by their favorite celebrities including single parenting. The researchers recommend that there should be a concerted effort by parents, guardians and the religious bodies to counsel the youths on sexual and productive health issues as well as emulating the ethics, norms and values of the Nigerian cum African culture.

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### Introduction:-

Social media has been widely acknowledged in recent times as an easy and modern way of communication. The role of social media platforms like the Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter and other apps in the lives of Nigerians and Africans in general is unquantifiable. From a young person's perspective, social media is positive. Information sharing with them is vital and social media makes it faster. Social media sites have an entertaining, educating and information exchange function which is amongst the positive aspect. They also aver that information sharing with these sites is faster coupled with the opportunity it affords the users to build valuable connections in one's areas of interest. Having noted the above, there is also the negative angle which Ibembinkosi in Omenugha (2018) asserts that information on social media can be misinterpreted and manipulated. Hence, there is a need for sensitizing the young people on how they can handle social media.

According to a report published by Verralle (2021), WhatsApp is the most popular social media in Nigeria with 93% mentions by internet users. Facebook and YouTube which are being used respectively by 86% and 82% of individuals with access to the internet. Instagram and Facebook messengers are 73% and 67% respectively. The

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study also states that in 2021, there are approximately 43 million social network users in Nigeria and the figure is projected to grow to 103 million users in 2026.

(The Punch, 2017) in a report which highlighted the extent to which Nigerians use social media notes that, “the youths are the most active because it creates the platforms for expressing themselves.” While Hitesh (2019), observes that “youths use social media more than any other demographic.” One of the young people’s main reason for using social media is to be updated on recent trends in the society, and main force behind the growing power of social media platforms is the smart phones and internet connectivity which is becoming cheaper and easier to access. The only limitation therefore could be ignorance or illiteracy in terms of the ability to use the hardware and software for maximum effects in the realm of communication, education, politics, economic, youth enlightenment and empowerment among others.

Based on the foregoing, the social media has become a great tool for engaging with the young people on contemporary issues, sexual and productive health issues as well as ethics, norms and values of the Nigerian society. Though, these category of people are often exposed to negative content such as porn, violence, vulgar language, sexual abuse and harassment etc which often leads to unwanted pregnancies and single Parenthood (aka Baby mamas and baby papas).

### **Statement Of The Problem**

The social media serve diverse functions as a result of their potentials which is why they have been embraced particularly by young people who are seen as the highest users as they often use it to either study or to keep themselves busy. Social media has also aided in publicizing the lifestyles of celebrities in the society which most of the young people who make use of the Internet see as role models or mentors and invariably emulate their behavioural patterns. Prominent amongst these lifestyle is the single parenthood which has become fashionable of recent. The aim of this study therefore is to examine the extent to which young people are exposed to the issue of celebrity single parenthood through the social media and to also examine the effects these exposures have on them.

### **Objectives Of The Study:-**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. find out the extent to which young people in Umuahia are exposed to celebrity single Parenthood messages on the social media;
2. determine the perception of young people in Umuahia about social media contents on celebrity single parenthood; and
3. determine the influence of messages on the social media about celebrity single parenthood on young people in Umuahia.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study

1. To what extent are the young people in Umuahia exposed to celebrity single parenthood messages on the social media?
2. What is the perception of young people in Umuahia about social media contents on single parenthood about celebrity single parenthood?
3. To what extent does the message on the social media about celebrity single parenthood influence the young people in Umuahia?

### **Literature Review:-**

#### **Social Media And Young People**

Chatora (2012) sees the term, 'social media' as instinct based tool and services that allows users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute and search for information online. While Abubakar (2011) defines social media as both internet and mobile based apparatus that allow people to easily share and discuss information. It is the interactive and collaborative nature of these tools as stated above that makes them 'social'. With the replacement of Web 1.0 with web 2.0, web- based tools now facilitate a social connectivity that enables users to produce, interact and share content online. Ebele in Omenugha (2018) observes that Internet users have thus evolved from consumers of web content to 'prosumers' who also produce content.

Nancy (2018) notes that social media has broken all the geographical and political boundaries that separate us as Africans. Young people at the forefront of change can share ideas, experiences and collectively work together. As a result of social media, young people now fast track the implementation of best practices that will ensure social and economic transformation.

In tandem with the aforementioned, Louise (2018) asserts that social media offers the potential to promote opportunities, services and communicate with youth, and facilitate positive youth development in the comfort of their space. She observes that the danger of social media is that any uncensored and non-factual information may go viral which can humiliate and shame others publicly. However, social media relies on many electronic devices like Tablets, iPads, laptops, and internet based technologies for connecting people. Thus, social media can be described as technologies that facilitate social interaction, make collaboration possible, and enable deliberation among people at the global level, Tayo, Adebola and Yahya (2019). Furthermore, in their own submission, Ali, Igbal & Igbal (2016), opines that social media is the collection of application such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube, among others that link people together as they share information through social networking.

Lester (2018) asserts that social media has been widely accepted as an easy and modern way of communication. However, there is a challenge in terms of controlling access to inappropriate content by young people, he further to say that this compromises the objectives around comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health and rights information for young people. For this reason, Thembinkosi states that information on social media can be misinterpreted and manipulated. Hence, the young people can be manipulated and misled by the avalanche of contents on the social media.

Over 120 million Nigeria are online according to the Nigeria communication commission. Seventy percent or over 80 million of them are young people between 18- 35 years. For most of them, the internet especially social media, is where they live and work. Their life styles are woven around, recorded, influence, amplified and fascinated by and on internet. On the other hand the young people can voice their demands on social media and through this bring about social change. Avodje (2021).

### **Celebrity Life Style On Social Media**

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have allowed celebrities to directly communicate with their fans and followers over the years and furthermore granted them direct access into their world.

Some celebrities have utilized their platforms effectively to speak openly with fans about important including personal issues while others have built their empires on social media. These celebrities have power to influence millions of people around the world with a single post, Karl Rodriguez (2020). This is why social media has become an increasingly dramatic environment for celebrities in Nigeria and across the world. Most celebrities use the social media to maintain their status and relevance by posting different content just to keep their followers busy. According to Malacoff (2019) countless celebrities post photoshopped and face tuned images of themselves that portray an unrealistic beauty standard.

As a result of this, researchers have also expressed serious concern over young people trying to look like celebrities they see on social media. One study by McLean, Paxton, Wertheim and Masters conducted in 2015 showed that middle school aged girls were more negatively impacted in terms of body image and eating behavior by manipulating their own selfies than by simply viewing traditional media images. Another study showed that posting selfies made women immediately feel anxious. Yet another found that girl's comparing themselves to images of celebrities was related to image dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. Most celebrities post their cars, houses, families, etc on social media in order to show off. Most of them are called social media celebrities. Social media celebrities as explained by digit magazine are highly visible media. They are also referred to micro celebrities as described by Marwick and Body (2011), micro celebrities construct an image of themselves to be consumed by peer users on social media, thus attracting them as fan base. Social media platforms are coded environment where the popularity metrics incite ordinary users to conduct self-expression and self-representation practice. Hence, celebrities are most time validated, graded or respected by the numbers of followers or comments and likes under his/her post. This is one of the major reason most celebrities strive to remain on the lime light by constantly post or update their page and present themselves in a good light( whether real or fake ). By doing these, they impress their followers and as a result influence them consequently.

Although, celebrity life style on social media or social media posts has the biggest impact on those who are the most vulnerable, whose self-esteem comes from how others perceive or respond to them who want to fit in says Andrienne (2019) a body image specialist.

### **Celebrity Single Parenthood Promotion On Social Media**

Sagari (2021) defines single parenthood as a parent bringing up a child or children alone without a partner. She went further to explain that the reasons for this can vary; they may have been in a relationship which they left, or their partner might have passed away, or been summoned to an active job. Also, some women choose to be single parents via surrogacy. Natalie (2021) describes single parenthood as the act of raising a child or children with only one parent in the house which can be caused by death, divorce and non-marriage. Other reasons for single parenthood can be; break up, abandonment, domestic violence, rape and single person adoption.

In recent time, the issue of single parenthood has been on the increase and has been constantly promoted on the social media mostly by celebrities. Previously in the African society it was seen as a disgrace and shame for a woman to get pregnant and bear a child or children outside wedlock, as such lady would have been seen as a promiscuous person. But in recent times it is no longer the case as Moemeka points out that “in the modern industrialized world, ethics is seen as a cloud of what ought to be done”. He went further to explain the age old moral advice that relates means positive to ends has been turned around. The young people and even most parents insist that means shouldn’t justify ends but rather ends should justify means. It no longer matters how goals are achieved; all that counts is reaching them. The news of celebrities single parent aka “baby mama and baby papa” are all over the social media with people involved being proud of their status as single parents. A typical example is Davido and Sophia Momodu. With Davido bragging in one of his songs that Dele Momodu (Sophia’s uncle is his boy). Another is the recent one where Pero Adeniyi (2face Idibia’s baby mama) described herself as a spoilt and a million dollar baby mama. Okporu (2021)

Also to buttress this fact is an entertainment show hosted by the DNA twins named “Music Buzz” which on one of its countdown show presented celebrity baby mama dramas on social media and people involved.( list was generated from the social media)

1. Tuface and Pero Adeniyi who had three children for him, Adesumbo Ajala who had two sons for him and Annie who he is presently married to and who has two kids for him.
2. Davido and Sophia Momodu a well-known entrepreneur as mentioned earlier, Chef cum model fiancée/baby mama, Chioma Rowland, American model, Mya Yafai, Larissa London and Ayotomide Labinjo
3. Wizkid whose notable baby mamas are Shola Ogudu, Binta Diallo and Jada Pollock
4. Burna Boy and Uju Stella
5. Runtown who has UK based Selena Leath and another UK based model, Jamila as baby mamas. Jamila went as far as uploading the ultra sound picture of her pregnancy on Instagram and tagged Runtown in order to prove she's pregnant for him (sourced from “Music Buzz produced by African Magic).

Furthermore, there are also celebrity single mothers like Genevieve Nnaji, Tonto Dikeh, Waje, Tiwa Savage, Biodun Okeowo, Linda Ikeji, Kate Henshaw, Yvonne Jegede, Mercy Aigbe, Adunni Ade and Iyabo Ojo (Nations newspaper, Dec.9, 2020)

In fact, it is now seen as a norm in the entertainment industry. Since social media is a conversation, driven by participants who are not confined by time, place, borders, social stigmas or any other confining factor. everyone can be part of social media and can also consume the messages. Hence, the young people keep consuming. In line with the saying that the eye is the gate way to a human heart; as the young ones keep consuming such information they tend to build their mindset around those abnormalities.

### **Young People’s Adaptation To Popular Trends**

Most young people have the natural instinct to follow trends. This is because as noted by Rall, Cottey and Williams(1999), it is a period when adolescent identities are understood to be commonly fluid, a period of ‘conversion’ during which the rudiments of an adult’s future self are explored and in one way or the other decided upon. Going by this assertion, young people try to explore different attitudes and adapt to those of the adult they like and in Daniel’s (2021) view point, most Nigerian youths look up to one celebrity or the other as role model. Also emphasizing on the young people’s adaptation to popular trend Crosnoe and Johnson (2011) noted that in general, adolescence and youth stages are complex period characterized by substantial cognitive and emotional changes

grounded in the unfolding development of the brain, as well as behavioral changes associated with basic psychosocial developmental tasks. In particular, young people are faced with the task of individuating from their parents while maintaining family connectedness to facilitate the development of the identities they will take into adulthood. At the same time, the overactive motivational/emotional system of their brain can contribute to suboptimal decision making. In most cases, Yetty (2019) noted that the young people are very impressionable and pay close attention to what celebrities are wearing and what they are doing. They want to be like them. Celebrities set fashion and lifestyle trends and young people follow. Yetty went further to explain the key factor enabling this adaptation as young people's ability to learn quickly and imbibe so much information, they are always curious and concerned about what is going on in the world around them. One of the ways they learn and express themselves in recent time is through social media. And at the end, they seek to define who they are through what they wear, their peculiar jargon experiences, hairstyles, group associations, et cetera. Accordingly, images from the media (soft-sell magazines, popular music, movies and drama series, celebrity talk shows, celebrity interviews, advertisements and product endorsements, and the appeals they come with) often provide the external basis from which teenagers will benchmark their thoughts, dreams, opinions, preferences, and associations, Uzuegbunam (2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks that underpin this study are the Modeling Theory of Communication and Media Ecology Theory.

The modeling theory was a spin-off from Albert Bandura's social learning theory. In this theory, Albert Bandura stresses on the role of social learning through observation and imitation. He explains that Modeling Theory operates in three simple steps which includes; observation, imitation and consequence.

The thrust of this theory is that people are influenced simply as a result of observing other people (monkey see, monkey do). From the observation of others, we learn what to do, what not to do, when to do it, and what to expect when we do it. Communication scholars have always used modeling theory to explain long-term influences of the media. Defleur and Denise, (1998) opine that it can help in explaining why minor changes take place among individuals, eventually to accumulate in major changes in the society. In relation to this study, modeling theory will be used to shed light on the growing culture of celebrity single parenthood in Nigeria, also the portrayal of single parenthood by celebrities on social media and its adverse consequences on the young people. Looking at the steps modeling theory operates in, the young people observe and read about these celebrities in social media. Since they (young people) lack the maturity and wisdom to decipher, they get attracted to their (celebrities) flashy lifestyle and then start to imitate them and there after the consequence which of course may be positive or negative. But in most cases, negative, as the rate of single parents keep increasing in our society in recent times.

Media Ecology Theory (MET) is a complex field of study that seeks to explain the ways media environments – abstract spaces produced by technology – affect, and shape our lives. It posits the digital environment of today is a space of constant interaction between people, and diverse media that are products of our technological reality, Sintelly (2020). Simply put, it aims to understand the social impact of technology and communication (McLuhan, 1964). According to him electronic media has revolutionized society, and society quickly become reliant on these communication technologies. The central premise of the theory is that the communication content doesn't exert as much influence as the medium of communication itself does. In other words, this means that we experience and perceive everyday life through the lens of various media, such as film, internet, digital media, and television. This theory is of the assumption that: media are infused into every act and action in society, media fixes our perceptions and organize our experiences, and media tie the world together.

Relating to this study, our present-day digital media, the internet and social media have enabled everyone to create and have access to all kinds of content, and consequently, shape the environment they live in. The young people are not left behind as they tend to live their life patterned towards what they see on the technological environment, being the social media.

### **Methodology:-**

The research design adopted for this study was survey. The population covered only human population, mainly young people in Umuahia urban. The target, Umuahia urban young people are predominantly students, young school leavers, and civil servants between the ages of 15 and 27. Single parents who fall within this age bracket were not left out also. Umuahia urban has an estimated human population of 816,983. World population review (2021). A

sample size of 288 was drawn using online Australian statistics calculator. The instrument that was used to gather information for this study was the structured questionnaire which was self-administered randomly to the 288 respondents.

A simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study. Fred (2019), states that this techniques is unbiased since each persons, event, object or thing in the population is given equal opportunity of being selected for the study.

### Data Presentation And Analysis

Analysis of data collected from different area in Umuahia, Abia state, the respondent's demographic variable and research question and answer sections. In administering and returning of questionnaire, out of the 288 that were distributed, 38 were not returned hence the total number of respondents for this research is 250. Out of 250 respondents 52(21%) respondents live at Isi gate axis of Umuahia, 53 (21%) stay at Umuwaya, 52(21%) at Oba street 53 (21%) reside, 40(16%) lived at Aba road. The total of 250 copies of questionnaire will be used for the analysis.. In terms of gender, result from the study indicated that 100 (40%) were male 150 (60%) were female. This goes to prove that more women were available and willing to respond to the questions. On marital status, 150(60%) were single, 25(10%) were separated while 25(10%) were widowed and 50(20%) were married. On the age of the respondent, about 40 (16%) were between the ages of 15-18 years 70(28%) were between the ages of 18-21 years, 60(24%) were between the age of 21-24 years while 80(32%) were between the ages of 24-27 years. From the data it can be deduced that the respondent were basically young people who have access to internet and use the social media. On qualification, 20(8%) has only WAEC, 80(32%) had only OND, 60(24%) has only Diploma 50(20%) has HND while 40(16%) were B.Sc. holders. On occupational distribution of respondent, 70(28%) were traders, 60(24%) were students, 80(32%) were teachers at different levels and 40(16%) were young school leavers. From the foregoing analysis, a large number of students and young school leavers responded to the questionnaire.

### Research Question One: To what extent are the young people in Umuahia exposed to celebrity single parenthood?

**Table 1:-** Frequency of exposure to social media messages on celebrity single parents.

| Options   | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Always    | 150       | 60         |
| Sometimes | 30        | 12         |
| Rarely    | 60        | 24         |
| Never     | 10        | 4          |
| Total     | 250       | 100        |

Refer to table 2, Row1, 150(60%) always read about celebrities who are single parents, 30(12%) read them sometimes, 60(24%) rarely read about celebrity single parents. It shows that (72%) of the respondents either always or sometimes read about celebrity single parents as against the minority (28%) that rarely or never read about celebrity single parents.

### Research Question Two: What is the perception of young people in Umuahia about social media content on celebrity single parenthood?

**Table 2:-** Respondents perception of social media messages on celebrity single parenthood.

| Options           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Interesting       | 60        | 24         |
| Entertaining      | 60        | 24         |
| Demoralizing      | 60        | 24         |
| None of the above | 70        | 28         |
| Total             | 250       | 100        |

Data in Table 2 shows that 60(24%) perceive celebrity single parenthood messages as interesting, 60(24%) said the messages are entertaining, while 60(24%) agree that the messages are demoralising, 70(28%) said none of above option.

**Research Question Three: To what extent does the message on the social media about celebrity single parenthood influence the young people in Umuahia?**

**Table 3:-** Effects of celebrity single parenthood messages on young people.

| Options                                       | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| It makes them see single parenthood as a norm | 100       | 40         |
| Makes them see it as a way of social exposure | 50        | 20         |
| Make them to be stronger and thrive           | 30        | 12         |
| None of the above                             | 70        | 28         |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | 250       | 100        |

Refer to Table 3, Column 1, 100(40%) said the social media messages on celebrity single parenthood has made them see single parenthood as a normal thing, 50(20%) agree that message on celebrity single parenthood makes them to believe that single parenthood is a way of social exposure, while 30(12%) submitted that the message on celebrity single parenthood makes them to be stronger and thrive as single parents. 70(28%) declined with none of the above option.

**Discussion Of Findings:-**

The first research question was answered by table 1, which is on the frequency of exposure of the young people to contents on celebrity single parent. Out of 250 respondents, 150(60%) admitted that they always read about celebrities on social media, 30(12%) said they do read about celebrities on social media sometimes. This ties up with Schuebe's (2006) argument which states that cable and satellite programming and the internet have added to youth's ability to stay current with ongoing celebrity drama even from foreign counties.

Research question two sought to find out the perception of young people in Umuahia about social media contents on celebrity single parenthood. From the analysis, respondents 60(24%) perceive celebrity single parenthood messages as Interesting, 60(24%) said the messages are entertaining while 60(24%) agree that the messages are informative, 70(28%) said none of above option. This analysis shows that the young people are internalizing these messages since the majority perceives the messages on a positive note. Reflecting upon Uzuegbulam (2017)'s earlier assertion, one of the ways in which young people express their youthfulness in recent times through social media enabled by new technologies and the media. Young people seek to define who they are through what they wear, their peculiar jargons, experiences, hair styles, group associations, et cetera. Accordingly, images from the media (soft-sell magazines, popular music, movies and drama series, celebrity talk shows, celebrity interviews, advertisements and product endorsements, and the appeals they come with) often provide the external basis from which teenagers will benchmark their thoughts, dreams, opinions, preferences, and associations.

Research question three sought to understand the extent of the influence which exposure to celebrity single parenthood messages has on the young people. Social media portrayal of the lifestyles of celebrity single parents has an influence on the attitudes and behavior of young people. Going by the data presented, the following can be construed: Out of 250 respondents, 100(40%) said the social media messages on celebrity single parenthood has made them see single parenthood as a normal thing, 50(20%) agree that the message on celebrity single parenthood makes them to believe that single parenthood is a means of social exposure, has made them to acquired new ideas on parenting 30(12%) agreed that the message on celebrity single parenthood makes them to be stronger and thrive as single parents. 70(28%) stuck with none of the above option. In addition, informal interviews carried out by the researcher showed that most of the young people who are single mothers said that exposure to celebrity single mothers' help to boost their self-esteem, confidence and value and also make them thrive as single mothers. The researcher also finds out that there is intentional and unintentional single parenthood. Unintentional are single parenthood which is caused by rape, abandonment, domestic violence and death of a spouse. This kind of single parenthood to a large extent is not deliberate and often times cannot be avoided.

Intentional single parenthood is single parenthood situation where by an adult become a single parent only with the intention of benefitting from the partner (mostly child support) or to secure inheritance for the off spring, to get fame or to lure the other party into marriage. This often happens among celebrities as there are several case of celebrity single parent trending on social media. Also in rating celebrity single parenthood influence on the young people, one

thing is apparent: celebrity influence on the surveyed young people shows that their opinions lie in the negative. Standing on Yetty William (2019)'s view point, young people are very impressionable and pay close attention to what celebrities are wearing and what they are doing. They want to be like them. Celebrities set fashion and lifestyle trends and young people follow. This research has confirmed this and further validate the application of the modeling theory of mass communication to the research problem.

### Conclusion And Recommendations:-

This study concludes by saying that young people's exposure to celebrity single parents' messages and lifestyle on the social media and their consequences amount to time bomb sitted upon by most parents. This study therefore recommends as follows,

1. Since majority of young people have access to internet and subsequently follow their favorite celebrities on social media, parents and guardians should also endeavor to follow them by checking their phones in order to find the kind of celebrities they follow.
2. Young people should also be counseled often in order to counter any negative idea emanating from their exposure to celebrity single parents on social media
3. Young people should be engaged from time to time on sexual and productive health issues as well as ethics, norms and values of the Nigerian society, This engagement should be both on social media and on one-on-one basis at large.

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