

Perceptions of university students on the relationship between social media use and substance abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Globally, the surge of new media technologies, through social networking sites and mobile instant messaging platforms, have largely transformed the behavioural patterns of individuals and communities. Although this is a widely revered development to have occurred to humankind, particularly to countries in the global south, it has also brought with it a near 'human-crisis' in the form of increased drug and substance abuse potentially threatening the well-being of individuals and society at large. The study, on which the article is based contributes to scholarship and practice by exploring the perceptions of university students on the relationship between social media use and the nature, and extent of drug/substance use among the youth in Zimbabwe. It focused on a selected university located in Harare. The study drew inspiration from a combination of Anthony Giddens's structuration thesis and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. It followed a qualitative research approach that triangulated documentary survey of related literature, and snippets of unstructured interviews, and focus group discussions. Research participants were selected through purposive and self-selection sampling techniques. One major finding of the study was that social media use created an opportunity for stimulating substance abuse especially among the youth, who are highly vulnerable to peer pressure and images of their peers, and role models having fun while taking drugs or related substances. Social media has also been instrumental in both amplification, and reduction, of drug and substance abuse. The article holds that university students perceived both social media use and substance use to be determinist and agentic. The paper, concludes that their relationship is largely bidirectional with each capable of changing the direction of influence.

Keywords: addiction, drug abuse, social media, structuration, substance abuse