

Sexual health promotion in the digital age: Challenges and opportunities for advancing the sexual and reproductive health of young African adults.

Emmanuel Olamijuwon

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

University of St Andrews, United Kingdom

Unlike other forms of social interactions on social media, particularly with family and friends, young African adults only superficially interact with sexual health information on social. However, high levels of engagement provide rudimentary markers of diffusion and are crucial elements of the success of any digital health promotion since many social media algorithms use engagement metrics to determine which social media content is shown to users and those in their network. What individual characteristics are associated with increase engagement with sexuality information, and why should social media be an attractive complement to existing sexual health promotion strategies? In this study, I leverage data from multiple sources, primarily digital sources, including Facebook interactions and an online survey, to answer these questions. The analysis of data from 897 young adults recruited via Facebook advertising in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa showed that the use of social media for sexuality education is associated with whether such use is free of effort, endorsed by society, align with their engagements with other messages, and helps them achieve improvement in their sexual and reproductive health. Lastly, a reflexive thematic analysis of wall posts and comments on the group highlights that sexual health promotion on social platforms like Facebook can uncover cultural stereotypes that could put women, girls, and families at risk of poor health and wellbeing. Precisely, I found that saving sex for marriage may have some culturally sensitive benefits that may pose adverse health risks if untamed.