



Original Article

The Relationship Between the Use of Social Media and Deviant Sexual Behavior Among Adolescents: A Qualitative Study at SMA Negeri 3 Palu

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ABSTRACT

Background: In the digital era, social media has become one of the most frequently used platforms among adolescents to interact, seek information, and access various types of content, including sexual content. This study aims to determine the relationship between social media use and sexual behavior among adolescents at SMA Negeri 3 Palu.

Method: This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design and involved 56 students selected using proportional random sampling. The research variables were social media use and adolescents' sexual behavior. The research instrument was a questionnaire, and data were analyzed using the Chi-square test.

Result: The findings revealed that 39 respondents (69.64%) were active social media users, and 24 respondents (61.5%) demonstrated deviant sexual behavior. The statistical test showed a p -value of 0.002 (<0.005).

Conclusion: There was a significant relationship between social media use and deviant sexual behavior among adolescents. These findings highlight the importance of supervision and education regarding social media use among adolescents.



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INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has changed the way adolescents interacted and obtained information. Social media has become one of the main platforms used by adolescents to communicate, develop their self-identity, and access various types of content. In Indonesia, the use of social media among adolescents continues to increase from year to year (Yusuf et al., 2023). However, there are growing concerns about the negative impacts of social media exposure, particularly related to sexual content. Several studies have shown that social media could shape sexual perceptions and behaviors that were inconsistent with prevailing social and cultural values (Zendrato et al., 2022; Siregar, 2022). Sexual content that circulates widely, both explicitly and implicitly, has the potential to influence adolescents' attitudes and behaviors.

Adolescents represent a group vulnerable to external influences because they were in a transitional phase of physical and psychological development (Nurul Alfianti & Nurrohmah, 2022). Exposure to sexual content on social media can encourage more risky sexual behaviors. On the other hand, social media also has the potential to serve as an educational tool if used positively (Auliya et al., 2023). Several previous studies have reported an association between social media use and adolescents' sexual behavior. However, most of those studies were descriptive in nature and did not explore in depth the mechanism underlying their relationship (Gani, 2020). In Indonesia, research that applies an analytical quantitative approach to examine causal relationships in this context remains limited..

Data from the Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey (SDKI, 2018) illustrate the tangible impacts of premarital sexual behavior among adolescents, such as unwanted pregnancies, the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, and unsafe abortion practices. In Central Sulawesi, the Provincial Health Office reported that the highest number of HIV cases occurred among the 15–19 age group, with a total of 209 cases (Dinkes Sulteng, 2023). Meanwhile, the Palu City Health Office recorded several cases of adolescents who sought counseling due to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (Dinkes Kota Palu, 2023). At SMA Negeri 3 Palu, the Guidance and Counseling teacher reported that cases of premarital pregnancy still occurred annually. This phenomenon assumed to be related to students' low understanding of sexuality and their high level of access to sexual content through social media. Based on this background, a study was necessary to scientifically examine the relationship between social media use and sexual behavior among adolescents.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. The study was conducted in February 2025 at SMA Negeri 3 Palu. The population consisted of all 132 tenth-grade students. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a total of 56 respondents.

$$\left(n = \frac{N}{1 + N(a)^2} \right)$$

$$\left(n = \frac{132}{1 + 132 (0,1)^2} \right)$$

$$(n = 56)$$

A proportional random sampling technique was applied. The independent variable was social media use, categorized as active if usage exceeded three hours per day and included viewing sexually related content. The dependent variable was sexual behavior, which was categorized as deviant if respondents answered “often” or “very often” for more than 50% of the items.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of 16 statement items divided into two groups: eight items measuring social media use and eight items measuring sexual behavior. The questionnaire had been tested for validity and reliability, with a validity coefficient of 0.512 and a reliability coefficient of 0.707.

Univariate analysis was conducted to describe the frequency distribution of each variable, while bivariate analysis was used to examine the relationship between the two variables using the Chi-square test. This study obtained ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Poltekkes Kemenkes Palu, with approval number 000393/KEPK POLTEKKES KEMENKES PALU/2025.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents Based on Age and Gender at SMA Negeri 3 Palu

Characteristics	n	%
Age		
15 years old	24	42.9
16 years old	32	57.1
Gender		
Male	28	50.0
Female	28	50.0

(Source: primary data 2025)

Table 1 shows the characteristics of respondents in this study. Among the 56 respondents, the majority of adolescents were aged 16 years (57.1%), while the remaining were aged 15 years (42.9%). In terms of gender, the distribution was balanced, with males and females each accounting for 50%.

Table 2. Distribution of Social Media Use Among Adolescents

Respondent Characteristics	n	%
Social media platforms that were frequently used on a daily basis		
Instagram	18	32.14
Youtube	2	3.57
Tiktok	29	51.79
Whatsapp	5	8.93
Facebook	2	3.57
Social media platforms that were frequently used to watch movies		
Instagram	0	0
Youtube	34	60.71
Tiktok	22	39.29
Whatsapp	0	0
Facebook	0	0
Social media platforms that were used to search for information		
Instagram	14	25.00
Youtube	2	3.57
Tiktok	28	50.00
Whatsapp	11	19.64
Facebook	1	1.79
Exposure to sexually explicit content on social media		
Yes	54	96.43
No	2	3.57
Purpose of Using Social Media		
Negative	25	44.64
Positive	31	55.36
Get Sexual Information		
Social Media	11	19.64
Not Form Social Media	45	80.36
Social Media Use		
Active	39	69.64

Inactive	17	30.36
Access to sexual content on social media		
Yes	29	51.79
No	27	48.21
Viewing Sexual Content		
Yes	24	42.86
No	31	55.36
Adolescent Sexual Behavior		
Deviant Behavior	32	57.14
Non-Deviant Behavior	24	42.86

(Source: Primary Data, 2025)

Table 2 shows that most respondents used TikTok (51.79%) and Instagram (32.14%) on a daily basis. The platform most frequently used for watching movies was YouTube (60.71%), while TikTok (50%) was the most commonly used platform for searching for information.

A total of 69.64% of respondents were classified as active social media users, defined as those who used three or more functions (watching, searching for information, and interacting) every day.

In addition, several findings required immediate follow-up through concrete implementation. First, 96.43% of respondents admitted to having watched pornographic content on social media. This figure is remarkably high and serves as an important indicator that adolescents are highly vulnerable to exposure to sexual content online.

Moreover, the majority of adolescents (69.64%) were active social media users. In terms of sexual behavior, 57.14% of respondents exhibited deviant behavior. These results suggest that the content consumed through social media influences adolescents' thought patterns and behaviors.

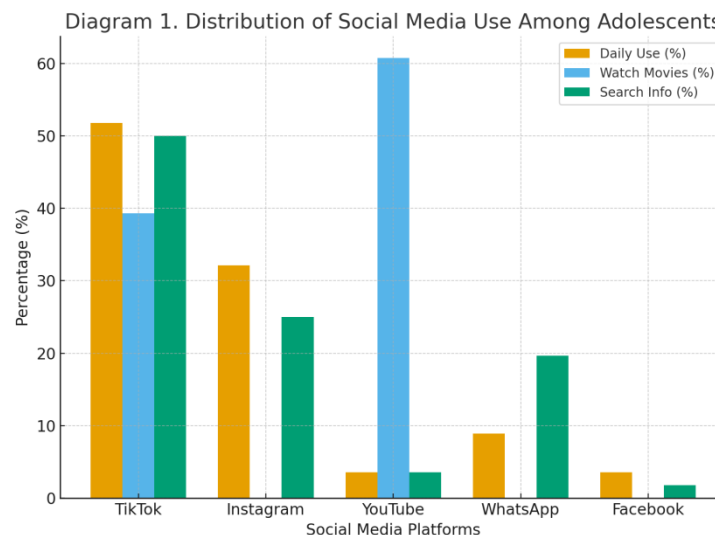


Figure 1. Distribution of Social Media Use Among Adolescents

The diagram illustrates that TikTok was the most dominant platform used by adolescents, both for daily activities (51.79%) and for seeking information (50%). Meanwhile, YouTube was more frequently used for watching movies (60.71%). Instagram was also quite popular, used daily by 32.14% of respondents and for searching information by 25%.

From these data, it is evident that social media serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a primary source of information for adolescents. This indicates that exposure to various types

of content, including sexual material, is highly possible. Therefore, digital education and supervision regarding the types of content consumed by adolescents are essential.

Table 3. The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Sexual Behavior Among Adolescents

Variable	Sexual Behavior				Value p*
	Deviant		Non-Deviant		
	n	%	n	%	
Social Media Use					
Active	24	42.9	15	26.8	0.002
Inactive	8	14.2	9	16.1	
(*Uji Chisquare)					

(*Uji Chisquare)

Table 3 shows that the Chi-square test yielded a p-value of 0.002 (<0.05), indicating a statistically significant relationship between social media use and deviant sexual behavior among adolescents.

Among the 39 respondents who were active social media users, 24 (61.5%) demonstrated deviant sexual behavior, while 15 (38.5%) did not. In contrast, among the 17 respondents who were inactive social media users, 8 (47.1%) exhibited deviant behavior and 9 (52.9%) did not.

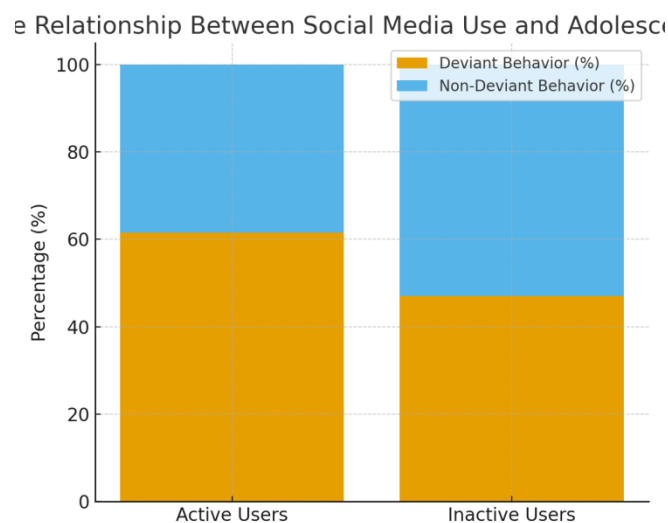


Figure 2. The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Adolescents' Sexual Behavior

Diagram 2 shows that adolescents who were active social media users exhibited deviant sexual behavior more frequently (61.5%) compared to inactive users (47.1%). This suggests that the frequency and intensity of exposure to social media content can reinforce deviant sexual urges, attitudes, and behaviors among adolescents. These findings highlight the need for more intensive supervision and digital literacy education among school-aged populations.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that there was a significant relationship between social media use and deviant sexual behavior. Respondents who were active social media users tended to exhibit deviant sexual behavior more frequently than those who were inactive. Many adolescents who actively used social media also displayed deviant sexual behaviors. The majority of adolescents in this study were active social media users, and more than half of them showed deviant sexual behavior.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by (Salsabiilaa et al., 2023), regarding the relationship between social media and sexual behavior among adolescents at SMK Negeri 8 Surabaya, which found a significant relationship between social media use and adolescents' sexual behavior. This is also in line with the research conducted by (Dusra, 2017), on the influence of internet media on deviant behavior among adolescents at SMA Negeri 1 Maros, which revealed a significant effect of watching pornographic films/videos on the internet on deviant sexual behavior.

Similarly Zandrato et al. (2022) in their literature review concluded that social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' attitudes and behaviors toward sexuality, particularly through mechanisms of modeling, desensitization to social norms, and sexual identity exploration. These studies support the findings of the present study, indicating that intensive social media use, without adequate supervision and education, contributes to an increase in deviant sexual behavior among adolescents.

This study has important implications for adolescents, particularly in raising awareness about the impact of social media use on sexual behavior. By understanding the relationship between these two factors, adolescents are expected to use social media more wisely and responsibly, as well as become more selective in accessing and sharing content. The study can also serve as a basis for adolescents to reflect on the importance of maintaining behavior aligned with social norms and moral values, to support healthy physical, mental, and social development.

This study also has several strengths that distinguish it from previous research. It employed a quantitative approach with Chi-square statistical analysis, providing empirical evidence of the relationship between social media use and adolescents' sexual behavior. This approach allows for more measurable results compared to descriptive analyses. Furthermore, the study highlights a developing social reality—namely, the high exposure of adolescents to sexual content on social media—making it a strong basis for policy advocacy among schools, parents, and local policymakers.

However, there are several limitations that should be considered. Some of the limitations include the data collection process, as the information provided by respondents through the questionnaire may not fully reflect their actual opinions. This might have occurred due to differences in perception, understanding, or honesty when completing the questionnaire.

Considering these limitations, future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of investigation by including other variables that could influence adolescent sexual behavior, such as self-control, peer influence, parental parenting styles, and sexual education. These variables should be analyzed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to adolescent sexual behavior.

Furthermore, future studies should consider conducting comparative research across regions and educational levels to identify differences in behavioral patterns and social media use based on social context and age. Research could also focus on exploring the types of sexual content most frequently accessed on social media and how adolescents respond to such content, so that the findings can serve as a foundation for designing more targeted interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study found a significant relationship between social media use and adolescents' sexual behavior at SMA Negeri 3 Palu ($p = 0.002$). Adolescents who were active social media users exhibited deviant sexual behavior more frequently than those who were inactive. This suggests that the intensity of exposure to social media content, including sexual material, can influence adolescents' sexual attitudes and behaviors through psychosocial mechanisms such as modeling, desensitization, and identity exploration.

The study has important implications for education and policy. Schools need to integrate comprehensive sex education and digital literacy into the curriculum and strengthen guidance and

counseling services using psychosocial-based approaches. Local governments and educational institutions should develop digital-based interventions, such as age-appropriate educational content and online modules, to counterbalance negative exposure on social media.

Additionally, stricter supervision and regulation are needed for social media platforms frequently accessed by adolescents, along with an enhanced role of families in promoting parental control and two-way communication regarding technology use.

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