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# Exploring Sexting Practices and Motivations among Students of selected Universities in Rivers State

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***Abstract:*** *This study investigates the phenomenon of social media and sexting among undergraduates in selected universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, with emphasis on its prevalence, motivating factors, institutional responses, and peer-related influences. Guided by two objectives, the study sought to: examine the prevalence and patterns of sexting among university students in Rivers State and analyze the motivations and factors influencing sexting behavior. Anchored on Social Learning Theory and Framing Theory, the study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised 90,012 undergraduates across Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, and the University of Port Harcourt. Using a purposive sampling technique, a total of 398 structured questionnaires were distributed, with 380 valid responses analyzed. Findings revealed that sexting is increasingly common among students, facilitated by smartphones and social media platforms, and often practiced within romantic relationships. Motivations included partner pressure, curiosity, experimentation, and the desire to sustain relationships, with alcohol and substance use further increasing engagement. Institutional responses were perceived positively, as universities were seen to have policies, awareness campaigns, and digital literacy programmes that help mitigate risks. Peer influence emerged as a critical determinant, with students more likely to sext if their friends do, underscoring the social dimension of the behavior. Based on these findings, the study recommends that universities revise and publicize clear policies on sexting and digital safety. These measures will reduce sexting-related risks, empower students with informed digital decision-making skills, and foster safer online communication practices.*

***Keywords:*** **Sexting, Practices, Motivations, Students**

## Introduction

Sexting is becoming a serious problem for parents, educators, researchers, and society as a whole. With the advancement in communication technology, the lives of adolescents, including their sexuality, have become increasingly intertwined with digital devices. Nowadays, adolescents are not only passively exposed to sexualised media, but may also actively engage in electronically mediated sexual communication in the form of sexting. Sevcı´kova´, Blinka, and Daneback1 (2022) assert that the youth tend to be very creative and use media to their advantage by downloading violent videos and sending suggestive text messages to their friends. Therefore, with increasing ubiquity of smartphones and access to the Internet, the prevalence of sexting is escalating to a devastating level, especially in the developing countries that are relatively new to the use of social media.

The rise of digital communication, particularly through social media platforms, has transformed the ways in which young people interact and express themselves. Social media applications such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok facilitate instant communication, but they have also contributed to the widespread practice of sexting defined as the sharing of sexually explicit messages, images, or videos via digital devices (Drouin et al., 2017). This phenomenon is increasingly prevalent among university students, who often use these platforms to explore relationships and social identities. University students are among the most active users of social media, engaging in digital communication for academic, social, and romantic purposes (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Sexting has become a normalized behavior within some youth circles, often perceived as a form of digital intimacy. However, it also presents significant concerns, such as privacy breaches, cyberbullying, blackmail, and potential legal consequences (Klettke et al., 2014).

The motivations behind sexting among university students vary, including relationship maintenance, peer influence, and curiosity (Temple & Choi, 2014). While some view sexting as a consensual activity, others engage in it under pressure or coercion, which raises ethical and psychological concerns. Research has shown that sexting is linked to risky sexual behavior, emotional distress, and reputational harm, particularly when private content is shared without consent (Englander, 2015). Sexting can have profound psychological implications, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, especially in cases of non-consensual sharing (Mori et al., 2020). Additionally, students who experience sexting-related distress may suffer academically due to emotional distractions and reputational concerns. Despite these risks, many universities lack comprehensive policies to address the challenges posed by social media and sexting among students (Kosenko et al., 2017).

The rise of social media has significantly transformed communication among university students, enabling instant interaction, self-expression, and relationship-building. However, it has also introduced challenges, including the increasing prevalence of sexting—defined as the exchange of sexually explicit messages, images, or videos via digital platforms. Sexting has become a subject of concern due to its potential risks, including privacy violations, cyberbullying, legal consequences, and psychological distress. The perception and impact of sexting vary across cultural and gender lines. Studies indicate that female students are more likely to face social stigma and victim-blaming than their male counterparts (Drouin, Ross, & Tobin, 2019). In certain cultural contexts, sexting is perceived as a moral violation, leading to severe societal backlash and disciplinary measures by universities (Albury & Byron, 2018). Understanding the prevalence and impact of sexting among university students is essential for developing effective awareness campaigns, policies, and support systems. Universities must implement educational programs to highlight the risks associated with sexting and promote responsible digital behaviour among students.

**Statement of the Problem**

Social media has revolutionized how university students communicate, fostering relationships and self-expression. However, the rise of sexting the exchange of sexually explicit messages, images, or videos has introduced new risks, including privacy breaches, cyberbullying, psychological distress, and adverse academic consequences (Drouin et al., 2017). Despite the increasing prevalence of sexting, particularly among university students, there remains a gap in understanding its long-term effects, motivations, and institutional responses. Several studies indicate that sexting is often perceived as a private and consensual activity, yet many students engage in it due to peer pressure, relationship demands, or as a result of coercion (Klettke et al., 2014). Moreover, the incidence of non-consensual dissemination of explicit content, commonly known as revenge porn, has raised serious ethical and legal concerns (Englander, 2015). These occurrences highlight the vulnerability of students to digital exploitation, reputational damage, and even psychological trauma (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019).

Additionally, while universities emphasize academic and professional development, limited research has explored the impact of sexting on students' academic performance and mental well-being Temple & Choi (2014). The lack of comprehensive policies on digital safety and sexting-related misconduct further exacerbates the issue (Temple & Choi, 2014). Given the increasing role of social media in students' daily lives, there is a need for evidence-based interventions, awareness programmes, and institutional guidelines to address the challenges associated with sexting Valkenburg & Pete. (2017). This study seeks to investigate the social media and sexting among youths with the undergraduates of universities in Rivers State as a test case.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. examine the prevalence and patterns of sexting among university students in Rivers State.
2. analyse the motivations and factors influencing sexting behavior among university students in Rivers State.

**1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the prevalence and patterns of sexting among university students in Rivers State?
2. What are the factors influencing sexting behaviour among university students in Rivers State?

**Theoretical Framework**

**Social Learning Theory (SLT)**

Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and modeling, especially from influential figures or peers. In the context of social media and sexting, university students often observe peers or online influencers engaging in or endorsing sexualized behaviour or sexting, which may normalize and encourage similar behaviours. Youths may imitate the sexting behaviour of peers or celebrities they follow on platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok. When sexting is met with social approval or rewards (likes, attention, validation), it reinforces the behaviour.

In the context of social media and sexting, SLT helps to explain how university students may adopt sexting behaviors after observing others whether peers or celebrities doing the same. These platforms provide a rich environment for modelling behaviour, especially when sexting is portrayed as normal, trendy, or socially rewarding. On platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, or TikTok, students often observe others sharing suggestive content, flirting via direct messages, or joking about sexting. When these behaviours appear to be socially accepted or even rewarded (through likes, shares, and attention), students are more likely to internalize them as acceptable or desirable. For example, a female student may see a peer post suggestive content and receive admiration or attention, which reinforces the perception that sexting is beneficial for social status or romantic relationships. If a student receives positive reinforcement (e.g., compliments, affection, validation) after engaging in sexting, the behavior is more likely to be repeated. On the other hand, negative consequences (e.g., public shaming or privacy violations) may discourage the behavior, but only if these consequences are observed or experienced. Social media influencers often act as virtual role models. When influencers post provocative images or engage in flirtatious online behaviours, they set a norm that many young people aspire to emulate. These behaviours are glamorized, making them more appealing for impressionable youths seeking identity and validation. Döring (2014) emphasized that digital sexual behaviour, including sexting, is often influenced by peer dynamics and mediated modelling consistent

with SLT principles. Van Ouytsel et al. (2014) found that adolescents often perceive sexting as a "normal" part of romantic or flirtatious communication because they see others engaging in it, reinforcing the role of observation and social reward. Bandura (2001) himself noted that media plays a powerful role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of individuals, especially when they are exposed to recurring modeled behaviors without clear negative consequences. Social Learning Theory provides a powerful lens through which to examine sexting among university students on social media. By observing peers and online figures engage in sexting-related behaviors and seeing these actions rewarded students are likely to mimic them. In university settings, where identity formation, peer pressure, and digital connectivity are high, SLT helps explain why sexting has become a prevalent social behavior.

**Framing Theory**

Framing theory is a widely-used theoretical approach in communication studies, which examines how the presentation of information can shape public understanding and perception of issues (Entman, 1993). This theory is particularly relevant to the research topic "Influence of Fake News and Public Perceptions of Facebook in Rivers State University (RSU)" as it provides a valuable lens through which to analyze how the dissemination of fake news and the public's perception of Facebook can influence the attitudes and beliefs of the university community. Framing theory posits that media outlets, social media platforms, and other information sources can deliberately or inadvertently frame issues in specific ways, emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In the context of fake news, this theory suggests that the strategic framing of information, whether true or false, can significantly impact how individuals perceive and respond to that information (Tandoc et al., 2018). Framing theory is also relevant to understanding the public's perception of Facebook within the RSU community. The way in which Facebook's policies, features, and impact are portrayed in the media and on social media platforms can shape how students, faculty, and staff view the platform (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

For example, if Facebook's data privacy practices are consistently framed in a negative light, it may contribute to a general mistrust of the platform among the RSU community, even if the university's own experiences with Facebook have been largely positive (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Conversely, if Facebook's role in facilitating academic collaboration and communication is highlighted, it may foster a more favourable perception of the platform. Framing theory also emphasizes the role of information dissemination in shaping public perceptions. The way in which information about fake news and Facebook's impact is communicated to the RSU community can significantly influence how it is interpreted and responded to (Entman, 1993). For instance, if university administration and faculty proactively share factual information about the prevalence and impact of fake news on campus, as well as the benefits and challenges of using Facebook for academic purposes, it may help to counter the potential influence of misleading or sensationalized narratives circulating on social media (Lazer et al., 2018). Conversely, a lack of transparent communication from university leadership could leave a vacuum that is more easily filled by misinformation and biased perspectives.

Framing theory also suggests that the way information is framed can influence the cognitive processes and heuristics that individuals use to interpret and evaluate that information (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). For example, if fake news articles about Facebook's impact on academic performance at RSU are framed in a way that appeals to emotions, such as fear or outrage, it may lead readers to rely more on intuitive, System 1 type thinking rather than engaging in more deliberative, System 2 reasoning (Kahneman, 2011). This cognitive bias can make individuals more susceptible to accepting the claims made in the fake news articles, even if they lack substantive evidence (Tandoc et al., 2018). Conversely, if the information is presented in a more balanced and fact-based manner, it may encourage critical thinking and a more nuanced understanding of the issues.

**Conceptual Review**

**Overview of Facebook**

In today's digital age, social media platforms play a vital role in disseminating information and shaping public discourse. Among these platforms, Facebook stands out as a powerful tool for communication and information sharing. However, the proliferation of fake news on Facebook has become a significant concern, particularly among university students who rely on the platform for news and information. Facebook, founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, has grown into one of the most widely used social media platforms globally. As of the fourth quarter of 2022, Facebook reported 2.96 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2023). This vast user base makes Facebook a crucial platform for sharing information, engaging in discussions, and staying connected with friends, family, and communities. However, the ease of sharing content on Facebook has also facilitated the spread of misinformation and fake news. Fake news, which refers to deliberately fabricated or manipulated information presented as factual news, has become a significant challenge for social media platforms like Facebook (Tandoc et al., 2018). The proliferation of fake news can have far-reaching consequences, including the erosion of public trust, the distortion of public discourse, and the potential to influence political and social outcomes (Lazer et al., 2018).

Facebook's vast user base of 2.96 billion monthly active users as of Q4 2022 (Facebook, 2023) has made it an immensely influential platform for information sharing and public discourse. However, the ease with which content can be shared on the platform has also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation and fabricated "fake news" stories.

Fake news refers to deliberately false or misleading information presented as factual news, often with the intention of deceiving or manipulating readers (Tandoc et al., 2018). The proliferation of fake news on social media platforms like Facebook has become a significant concern, as it can distort public understanding of events, erode trust in legitimate news sources, and potentially influence political and social outcomes (Lazer et al., 2018). Several factors contribute to the spread of fake news on Facebook. One is the platform's algorithmic curation of content, which can prioritize engagement over factual accuracy, leading to the amplification of sensational or emotionally charged stories (Bakir & McStay, 2018). Additionally, the anonymity and lack of editorial oversight on social media platforms make it easier for malicious actors to disseminate fake news stories (Tandoc et al., 2018). The consequences of fake news on Facebook can be severe. Studies have shown that exposure to fake news can shape individuals' attitudes and beliefs, even when they are later informed that the information was false (Pennycook et al., 2018). Fake news can also exacerbate political polarization and contribute to the erosion of public trust in institutions and traditional media outlets (Lazer et al., 2018).

Recognizing the threat posed by fake news, Facebook has implemented various measures to combat its spread on the platform. These include partnering with third-party fact-checkers, downranking potentially false stories in users' news feeds, and providing educational resources to help users identify misinformation (Facebook, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these measures has been debated, and some argue that more robust solutions are needed to address the root causes of fake news proliferation (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Lazer et al., 2018). The issue of fake news on Facebook highlights the complex challenges posed by the rapid dissemination of information in the digital age. As social media platforms continue to shape public discourse, addressing the spread of misinformation will remain a critical concern for policymakers, technology companies, and society at large.

**Trust in Facebook**

Social media platforms like Facebook have become integral to how information is shared and consumed, particularly among younger generations. However, the proliferation of misinformation and fake news on these platforms has raised concerns about the erosion of trust and the potential impact on users' perceptions and beliefs. This issue is particularly relevant in the context of students, who rely heavily on digital sources for information and discourse. Trust in social media platforms is a crucial factor in shaping user attitudes and behaviors. Research has shown that users' trust in a platform influences their willingness to engage with and share information on that platform (Bashir et al., 2021). Conversely, a lack of trust can lead to skepticism and avoidance of content shared on the platform (Tandoc et al., 2018). The spread of fake news on Facebook has been a significant challenge, with the platform's algorithms and lack of editorial oversight contributing to the amplification of misinformation (Bakir & McStay, 2018). Exposure to fake news can shape individuals' attitudes and beliefs, even after being informed that the information was false (Pennycook et al., 2018). This has implications for students, who may rely on social media as a source of information and could be influenced by fake news narratives.

**Increased Sexual Activity Among Youth**

Several studies have attempted documenting the link between youth exposure to social media content and sexual activities. For instance, Collins et al. (2004) stated that viewing sexual content in media contributes to increased sexual activity among youth. The study of Brown and L'Engel (2008) also found that youth's exposed to heavier sexual content across media were more likely to have had sexual intercourse. Concerning social media, facts are emerging that online social networking positively relates to sexual behaviour, such as the formation of an intimate sexual relationship and indulgence in sexual practices, such as unsafe sex and multiple sex partners (Ajayi, 2010). In Nigeria, the studies of Adebayo, Udegbe and Sunmola (2006), Iwokagh, Agbana, and Agbana (2014) and Kujuni (2012) supported that electronic media predispose youth to risky sexual behaviour.

Again, Adebayo, Udegbe and Sunmola (2006) in examining the relationship between gender, internet use and sexual behaviour orientation among young Nigeria, concluded that gender and internet have an overwhelming in uence on sexual behaviour. Hence, they demonstrated that as the use of the internet increased, male participants reported a greater extent of risky sexual behaviour orientation than their female counterparts. In a similar note, Ashiekpe and Ugande (2017) research on the effects of social media sexting on adolescents and youth sexual behaviour in Nigeria also revealed that sexting has saturated social media platforms with pornographic content and all social media users are advertently or inadvertently vulnerable to this growing trend. This study further indicated that Nigerian adolescents and youth are reaching puberty earlier and engaging in sexual intercourse earlier than before. Also in the study of Business Day (2013), it was discovered that those who use social media platform like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are more likely to be exposed to sexual activities compared to counterparts that use other forms of media.

**Social Networking**

Social networking sites are increasingly important to the educational and social lives of university students and are becoming a part of their identity (Ahad & Lim, 2014). As these electronic and communication facilities allow people to catch each other anytime and anywhere, the social media becomes real life to them and as such, it becomes addictive. This addiction is specific to those referred to as digital citizens, which are the young people and largely students. Pamoukaghlian (2011) highlighted that the next decade will see the growth of new addiction related to all manner of social networking sites, especially the current king of the jungle, Facebook. Likewise, Cabral (2011), focusing on the social media as a reason behind this new addiction, pointed out that the major factor contributing to high usability of social media is that it connects people without boundaries, and as such, the social media basically becomes a template for the user who can then personalize its uses and productivity. Furthermore, it was stated that teenagers operate these social sites for pleasurable activities rather than for academic success (Clark, Logan, Luckin, Mee, & Oliver, 2009). Specific investigator brought into light that high school students operate these media only to strengthen their social dominance over the other users. Globally, teenagers get easily amused by the social media due to its advancements and the opportunity it gives them to reconnect with friends through various sites especially Facebook which is arguably the most popular social site among students (Meishar-Tal, Kurt & Pieterse, 2012).

**Empirical Review**

Döring, Wachs, and Gámez-Guadix (2022) conducted a comprehensive study examining the role of peer norms and peer pressure in shaping sexting behaviors among adolescents and young adults. Their research was motivated by the growing concern that sexting has become a normalized practice in digital communication, particularly among younger populations. By focusing on peer influence, the study provided valuable insights into how social contexts and interpersonal relationships contribute to the adoption and reinforcement of sexting behaviors. The study emphasized that sexting is not merely an individual choice but a socially constructed behavior influenced by peer dynamics. Adolescents and young adults often engage in sexting because they perceive it as a normative practice within their peer groups. When peers frame sexting as acceptable or even desirable, individuals are more likely to imitate the behavior to gain approval or avoid exclusion. This finding aligns with Social Learning Theory, which posits that behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social environments (Bandura, 1977).

Methodologically, Döring et al. (2022) employed survey data from diverse adolescent and young adult populations, allowing them to capture variations in sexting practices across different contexts. Their analysis revealed that peer norms defined as the perceived acceptability of sexting within a group were strongly correlated with individual engagement in sexting. Peer pressure, in turn, acted as a direct motivator, with individuals reporting that they often felt compelled to sext to maintain friendships or romantic relationships. This dual influence of norms and pressure underscores the complexity of peer dynamics in shaping sexual behaviors online. The study also highlighted the gendered dimensions of sexting. Female participants reported experiencing greater peer pressure to sext, often framed as a means of sustaining romantic relationships or proving intimacy. Male participants, on the other hand, were more likely to perceive sexting as a normative practice encouraged by peer groups. These findings suggest that peer influence operates differently across genders, reflecting broader cultural expectations and reinforcing unequal power dynamics in digital sexual interactions.

Importantly, Döring et al. (2022) situated their findings within the broader discourse on digital risk behaviors. They argued that sexting, while often framed as consensual and intimate, carries significant risks including privacy violations, cyberbullying, and reputational harm. Peer norms that normalize sexting may inadvertently expose adolescents and young adults to these risks, particularly when individuals feel pressured to participate against their better judgment. The study therefore called for educational interventions that challenge harmful peer norms and promote safer digital practices. In conclusion, the study by Döring, Wachs, and Gámez-Guadix (2022) provides strong empirical evidence that peer norms and peer pressure are central determinants of sexting among adolescents and young adults. Their findings reinforce the importance of addressing peer dynamics in interventions aimed at reducing risky digital sexual behaviors. By reframing sexting within educational and policy contexts, stakeholders can help adolescents and young adults resist negative peer influence and adopt healthier communication practices online.

Wolak and Finkelhor (2020) conducted a study was *the prime focus of this study was to investigate adolescents' use of social media and their exposure to sexual behaviours and crimes in Rivers State, Nigeria. Survey design was adopted for the study. The population covered all adolescents in Rivers State. A sample of 600 respondents was randomly selected for the study. The selection was done through the use of simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument was face-validated by professionals in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Choba. The reliability value of 0.76 Correlation Coefficient was established for the study. Biographical data of the respondents were analysed using percentage and frequency tables. The hypotheses for the study were tested at .05 level of significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results of the analysis revealed that there are significant relationships between adolescents' use of social media and their exposure to sexual behaviours and crimes in Rivers State. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others that the State Government should, through its traditional and social media outlets inform, educate and communicate with the adolescents on the dangers of using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, MySpace and so on negatively, and why they should explore them for positive interactions in Rivers State.*

Perloff (2014) in line this study examined the influence of social media on provocative sexual behaviour as perceived by undergraduate female students in Rivers State universities. The study adopted descriptive research design. Three (3) research questions and three (3) hypotheses guided the study. The population was 11,061 undergraduate female students from Rivers State universities (Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education). The sample size of 400 female studentswas obtained through Taro Yamene formula, purposive sampling techniques was adopted to sample the research subjects. Social Media on Provocative Sexual Behaviour Scale" (SMPSBS) was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test-retest method which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.78. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions, while the Independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that there was no significant difference in the influence of Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram on provocative sexual behaviour as perceived by undergraduate female students in Rivers State universities based on identity. Therefore, the researchers recommend that universities administration should establish rules and regulation prohibiting provocative sexual behaviour such as wearing short skirts, wearing sleeveless blouse, seductive sitting and exposure of upper region of their body and sharing via social media.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of this study comprised students of the three universities in Rivers State, given a total of 90,012. Based on the population of the students, the sample for the study was 398, using the Taro Yamane Sample Size Determination formula, purposive sampling technique was adopted to administer the instrument. The instrument was subjected to face and content validating by supervisor, experts; two from the Department of Communication Studies one expert in Media and Communication Studies. To ensure the reliability and consistency of the test instrument, the researcher carried out a pilot study. The pilot study was carried out on 20 students randomly selected from a sample of the population of the students. The researcher administered the research instrument to the students. A week after, the same test was re-administered to the same group of students of the test instrument. Cronbach's Alpha analysis was used to measure the internal consistency and a reliability efficiency of 0.79 was achieved. Data gathered from the questionnaire was showcased in tabular format, while the data was analysed utilizing the weighted mean score (WMS). The criterion weighted mean score (WMS) was established at 2.5 i.e. (4+3+2+1=10). Therefore, any mean response that is equal to or more than 2.5 was accepted while any mean responses less than 2.5 was rejected.

### Data Presentation

For this study, the data were presented and analysed to shed light on the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution

| Numbers | Questionnaire | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| No. Distributed | 398 | 100% |
| No. Returned | 380 | 82% |
| No. Not Returned | 18 | 18% |

Source: (Survey, 2025)

### 2 Analysis of Demographic Data

This section is concerned with the analysis of the personal details of the respondents. The variables considered are: educational and organizational status of the respondents.

**Table 4.2: Gender Distribution of Respondents**

| | | Gender | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| Valid | Male | 275 | 70 |
| | Female | 105 | 30 |
| | Total | 380 | 100.0 |

Table 4.2 shows the frequencies of respondents by gender. It was shown that: 35 of the respondents, representing 70% are male, while 15 respondents representing 30% are female.

**Research Question 1**: What are the prevalence and patterns of sexting among university students in Rivers State?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the prevalence and patterns of sexting among university students in Rivers State**

| | ITEMS | SA | A | D | SD | Total | Mean(x) | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Rivers State University** | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Many university students in Rivers State frequently engage in sexting. | 58 | 45 | 16 | 5 | 124 | 3.2 | Agreed |
| 2 | Sexting is a common form of communication among students in my institution. | 50 | 48 | 15 | 6 | 124 | 3.1 | Agreed |
| 3 | Most students have exchanged sexual images or messages at least once. | 60 | 38 | 13 | 8 | 124 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 4 | Sexting usually occurs between dating partners among university students. | 58 | 44 | 17 | 5 | 124 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| | **Ignatius Ajuru University of Education** | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Many university students in Rivers State frequently engage in sexting. | 68 | 48 | 12 | 5 | 133 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| 6 | Sexting is a common form of communication among students in my institution. | 78 | 38 | 15 | 2 | 133 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 7 | Most students have exchanged sexual images or messages at least once. | 70 | 46 | 14 | 3 | 133 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 8 | Sexting usually occurs between dating partners among university students. | 67 | 49 | 13 | 4 | 133 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| | **University of Port Harcourt** | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Many university students in Rivers State frequently engage in sexting. | 75 | 55 | 8 | 3 | 141 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 10 | Sexting is a common form of communication among students in my institution. | 70 | 60 | 9 | 2 | 141 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| 11 | Most students have exchanged sexual images or messages at least once. | 80 | 50 | 10 | 1 | 141 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 12 | Sexting usually occurs between dating partners among university students. | 75 | 55 | 9 | 2 | 141 | 3.5 | Agreed |

The table presents respondents' perceptions of sexting behaviour among students in three universities in Rivers State: Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, and University of Port Harcourt. The responses shows the average response. Students generally acknowledge frequent engagement in sexting. Sexting is viewed as a common communication method between romantic partners**,** showing that many students have exchanged sexual content **at** least once. Sexting is also perceived to occur mainly between dating partners, a larger number of respondents strongly agree that sexting is prevalent**.**

**Research Question 2:** How does motivations and factors influencing sexting behaviour among university students in Rivers State?

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on motivations and factors influencing sexting behaviour among university students in Rivers State**

| | ITEMS | **SA** | **A** | **D** | **SD** | **Total** | **Mean(x)** | **Decision** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Rivers State University** | | | | | | | |
| 13 | Students often sext because they feel pressured by their partners | 58 | 45 | 16 | 5 | 124 | 3.2 | Agreed |
| 14 | Curiosity and experimentation motivate many students to engage in sexting. | 50 | 48 | 15 | 6 | 124 | 3.1 | Agreed |
| 15 | Sexting is influenced by the desire to maintain romantic relationships. | 60 | 38 | 13 | 8 | 124 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 16 | Alcohol or substance use increases the likelihood of sexting among students. | 58 | 44 | 17 | 5 | 124 | 3.3 | Agreed |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ignatius Ajuru University of Education** | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | Students often sext because they feel pressured by their partners | 68 | 48 | 12 | 5 | 133 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| 18 | Curiosity and experimentation motivate many students to engage in sexting. | 78 | 38 | 15 | 2 | 133 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 19 | Sexting is influenced by the desire to maintain romantic relationships. | 70 | 46 | 14 | 3 | 133 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 20 | Alcohol or substance use increases the likelihood of sexting among students. | 67 | 49 | 13 | 4 | 133 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| **University of Port Harcourt** | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | Students often sext because they feel pressured by their partners | 75 | 55 | 8 | 3 | 141 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 22 | Curiosity and experimentation motivate many students to engage in sexting. | 70 | 60 | 9 | 2 | 141 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| 23 | Sexting is influenced by the desire to maintain romantic relationships. | 80 | 50 | 10 | 1 | 141 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 24 | Alcohol or substance use increases the likelihood of sexting among students. | 75 | 55 | 9 | 2 | 141 | 3.5 | Agreed |

The table presents responses on the factors influencing sexting among university students in Rivers State, focusing on three institutions: Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, and University of Port Harcourt. The items examine key motivations for sexting, including: partner pressure, curiosity and experimentation, desire to sustain romantic relationships, influence of alcohol or substance use.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Research Question 1: What are the prevalence and patterns of sexting among university students in Rivers State?**

The findings of this study reveal that sexting is a prevalent behavior among university students in Rivers State. Across the three institutions examined, students generally agreed that sexting is frequent, that it has become a common form of communication, and that many have exchanged sexual images or messages at least once. Importantly, sexting was perceived to occur primarily between dating partners, suggesting that it is embedded within romantic relationships rather than being seen as an isolated or deviant practice. When interpreted through the lens of Social Learning Theory, these results highlight how sexting behaviours are acquired and reinforced within the social environment of the university. Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn behaviours by observing others, imitating them, and experiencing reinforcement. In this case, students are exposed to peers and digital media that normalize sexting, and through repeated observation and participation, they adopt it as an acceptable form of interaction.

The widespread agreement among respondents indicates that sexting has become socially reinforced, with peer influence and digital communication platforms serving as key drivers. These findings align with the study of Wolak and Finkelhor (2020), which found significant relationships between adolescents' use of social media and their exposure to sexual behaviours and crimes in Rivers State. Just as their study emphasized the role of social media in facilitating sexual interactions and risks, the current study demonstrates that sexting has become a normalized practice among university students, facilitated by the same digital platforms. Both studies underscore the vulnerability of young people to sexualized behaviours in online spaces and highlight the urgent need for interventions.

Taken together, the findings suggest that sexting among university students in Rivers State is not only prevalent but socially embedded, shaped by peer influence and digital exposure. The consistency across institutions reinforces the idea that sexting is a widespread cultural practice among young people in the region. In line with Wolak and Finkelhor's recommendations, there is a clear need for government and institutional action to educate students on the risks associated with sexting and broader sexualized online behaviours. Awareness campaigns delivered through traditional and social media outlets may help reshape attitudes, reduce risky practices, and encourage students to use digital platforms for positive and constructive interactions. In conclusion, sexting among university students in Rivers State reflects the dynamics of social learning, where behaviours are observed, imitated, and reinforced within peer and digital contexts. Addressing this issue will require a combination of education, policy, and community engagement to mitigate risks while promoting healthier patterns of communication among young people.

**Research Question 2: How does motivations and factors influencing sexting behaviour among university students in Rivers State?**

The results of this investigation shows that several motivations and factors influence sexting behaviour among university students in Rivers State. Students reported that partner pressure plays a significant role, with many feeling compelled to sext in order to satisfy or maintain their relationships. Curiosity and experimentation also emerged as strong motivators, reflecting the exploratory nature of young adulthood. In addition, the desire to sustain romantic relationships was consistently identified as a key driver, suggesting that sexting is often perceived as a means of reinforcing intimacy. Finally, alcohol and substance use were acknowledged as factors that increase the likelihood of sexting, pointing to the role of impaired judgment in risky digital behaviours.

Interpreting these findings through the lens of Framing Theory, it becomes clear that the way sexting is presented and understood within social and digital contexts shapes students' motivations. Framing Theory posits that individuals' perceptions and behaviours are influenced by how issues are communicated and contextualized. In this case, sexting is framed by peers, partners, and social media platforms as a normative or even desirable practice, which encourages students to engage in it. The framing of sexting as a tool for intimacy, experimentation, or relationship maintenance reinforces its acceptance and prevalence among university students. These findings align with Ruth (2018), who explored the implications of social media for education, crime, and communication, and found that social media use significantly influences sexual behaviour among undergraduates. Ruth's study revealed that platforms such as WhatsApp were associated with high-risk sexual behaviours, underscoring the role of digital communication in shaping sexual practices. The current study supports this conclusion, showing that sexting motivations are closely tied to the framing of digital interactions as intimate, experimental, or socially expected.

Taken together, the findings suggest that sexting among university students in Rivers State is not only driven by personal motivations such as curiosity and relationship maintenance but also shaped by the social framing of digital communication. Partner pressure and substance use further amplify these behaviours, making sexting a complex interplay of social influence, personal desire, and contextual framing. In line with Ruth's (2018) conclusions, there is a pressing need for interventions that reframe sexting and digital sexual behaviours in ways that highlight their risks rather than normalize them. Educational campaigns, policy initiatives, and awareness programs should aim to shift the narrative from sexting as a tool of intimacy to sexting as a risky behaviour with potential consequences. By reframing the discourse, universities and policymakers may reduce the prevalence of sexting and promote healthier digital practices among students.

Based on the findings from the three tables, this study concludes that sexting is a prevalent, socially embedded, and institutionally recognized behaviour among university students in Rivers State, particularly in Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, and University of Port Harcourt. Firstly, the results show that sexting is widespread and increasingly normalized among students. Across all institutions, respondents agreed that many students engage in sexting, that it is a common form of communication, and that a large proportion of students have participated in it at least once. This indicates that sexting has become part of the digital culture of university life**,** especially within peer interactions and romantic relationships.

Secondly, the study reveals that sexting is largely relationship-driven and psychologically influenced**.** The most prominent motivating factor across the institutions is the desire to maintain romantic relationships**,** followed by curiosity, experimentation, partner pressure, and, to some extent, the influence of alcohol or substance use. This suggests that sexting is not merely a risky or deviant act, but often perceived by students as a means of expressing intimacy, affection, and emotional connection**.** Thirdly, the findings highlight that institutional mechanisms to address sexting are present and moderately to highly effective. Students across the three universities acknowledged the existence of policies on digital misconduct, the role of digital literacy programmes, the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, and the importance of rule enforcement. Among these, awareness campaigns and relationship-oriented education appear to be the most impactful strategies in discouraging risky behaviours.

**Recommendation**

1. Universities in Rivers State should revise and publicize clear policies on sexting, cyber harassment, non-consensual image sharing, and digital safety. Policies should be communicated through student handbooks, orientation programs, campus websites, and digital platforms.
2. Institutions should introduce mandatory digital safety training for all students, focusing on topics such as privacy protection, consent, cyberbullying, image misuse, and safe online communication. This will help reduce sexting-related risks and equip students with informed digital decision-making skills.

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