

Social Media and Youth Culture: A Threat to Societal Cultural Values Among Adolescents in Tertiary Institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria

Abstract

Social media has become a dominant force in the daily lives of adolescents in tertiary institutions, reshaping how they communicate, learn, and express identity. In Cross River State, Nigeria, a region with rich cultural heritage including Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara and Yakurr traditions, students in institutions such as the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, College of Education Akamkpa, and Federal Polytechnic Ugep are among the heaviest consumers of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp and X. This study examines social media as a threat to cultural values among adolescents in tertiary institutions in Cross River State. Using Cultural Imperialism Theory and Social Learning Theory as the theoretical framework, the paper explores how interactive, algorithm-driven platforms expose students to global content that often conflicts with indigenous norms of language, dressing, communalism, and respect for authority. The study identifies key manifestations of this influence, including the decline in use of indigenous languages, changes in dressing and moral standards, weakening of communal values, reduced participation in cultural activities, and academic distraction. At the same time, the paper acknowledges the positive roles of social media in education, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and cultural promotion, drawing examples from India, Kenya, South Africa, the US and the UK where digital platforms have been used to advance learning and document heritage. The study further highlights the negative impacts of unchecked social media use on cultural values and proposes strategies for mitigation: integration of digital literacy and cultural education into the curriculum, leveraging social media to promote indigenous culture, strengthening family and community engagement, policy and institutional support, and encouraging student-led cultural content creation. The paper concludes

Review Article

Adalikwu Rose Amokeye^{1*}

¹Doctor of sociology, University of Cross River State, Nigeria

***Correspondence:** Adalikwu R.A, Doctor of sociology, University of Cross River State, Nigeria; E-mail: adalikwurose4343@gmail.com

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that the challenge is not social media itself, but the absence of intentional strategies to mediate its influence. With deliberate intervention, social media can be transformed from a threat into a tool for cultural preservation and youth development in Cross River State. poor understanding leads to invalid assessment data and failure to achieve the objectives of continuous assessment. The study concludes that for continuous assessment to achieve its goals, teachers must be adequately equipped with knowledge, skills, and institutional support.

Keywords: Social Media; Societal; Cultural; Values; Adolescents

Introduction

Social media has become one of the most influential forces shaping human interaction in the 21st century. Defined as internet-based platforms that allow users to create, share, and exchange content, social media has moved beyond mere communication to become a central space for identity formation, education, commerce, and cultural expression [1]. With over 4.9 billion active users globally as of 2023, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, X, and YouTube dominate the daily lives of young people. In Nigeria, the situation

is no different. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reported that more than 70% of internet users in Nigeria are between the ages of 16 and 34, the majority of whom are students in tertiary institutions.

In Cross River State, Nigeria, a region celebrated for its diverse cultural heritage including the Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, Yakurr and other ethnic groups, adolescents in tertiary institutions are among the heaviest consumers of social media. Campuses such as the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, College of Education Akamkpa, and Federal Polytechnic Ugep have witnessed a surge in smartphone ownership and campus Wi-Fi access. This has made social media an ever-present companion for students, influencing how they dress, speak, relate, and perceive the world around them [2]. If this trajectory continues, we may speculate that within the next decade, indigenous languages in Cross River State could face accelerated decline among the educated youth. As more students prefer to communicate in Pidgin and English slang popularized online, Efik and Ejagham may be relegated to older generations, weakening intergenerational transmission of culture. Youth culture refers to the collective behaviors, values, styles, and norms that characterize young people within a society.

Traditionally, in Cross River State, youth culture was transmitted through family, community elders, cultural festivals, initiation rites, and formal education. These agents ensured the preservation of indigenous languages, respect for elders, communalism, and moral conduct. However, the rise of social media has introduced a competing agent of socialisation that operates 24 hours a day, across borders, and largely without regulation [3]. The content adolescents consume online is often produced outside Nigeria and reflects Western lifestyles, consumerism, and individualism. This raises critical questions about the long-term implications for cultural values in the state.

It is plausible to speculate that without intervention, tertiary institutions in Cross River State may gradually shift from being custodians of culture to mere consumers of global trends. Cultural festivals like the Calabar Carnival could become “*Instagram events*” valued more for online visibility than for their historical meaning. Respect hierarchies that once defined student-lecturer and student-elder relations may further erode as online influencers replace community elders as role models.

Adolescence is a developmental stage marked by identity exploration and susceptibility to external influence. During this period, individuals seek to answer the question “*who am I?*” and often turn to peers and media for answers. Social media algorithms are designed to maximise engagement by promoting trending, sensational, and

often foreign content. As a result, adolescents in tertiary institutions are repeatedly exposed to lifestyles that may conflict with their cultural heritage. For example, the promotion of indecent dressing, slang, and behaviors that undermine respect for authority have become common on campuses, raising concerns among parents, educators, and cultural custodians [4].

Looking forward, one may speculate that the next wave of social media technologies such as AI-generated content, virtual reality, and short-form video will intensify this effect. If adolescents already spend 5-8 hours daily online, immersive platforms could make cultural disconnection even deeper, creating a generation that is digitally global but culturally detached from Cross River traditions.

Empirical studies in Nigeria have documented the growing influence of social media on youth values. Olatunji and Ajayi [5], found that excessive use of social media among Nigerian undergraduates correlates with the adoption of foreign values and a decline in participation in cultural activities. Similarly, a study by Eneyo and Bassey [6], in South-South Nigeria revealed that students spend an average of 5 to 8 hours daily on social media, with less than 20% of that time devoted to academic purposes. The rest is spent on entertainment, gossip, and following international celebrities. In Cross River State, anecdotal evidence and media reports suggest similar patterns, with traditional dance groups, cultural clubs, and indigenous language societies recording declining membership among students.

Speculatively, if current usage patterns persist, we might expect a rise in identity confusion and value conflicts among graduates. Students who spend their formative years imitating online trends may struggle to reintegrate into community life after school, leading to tension between “*campus culture*” and “*home culture*.” This could also affect leadership, as future policymakers and teachers may lack deep grounding in local customs, making cultural policy less effective.

It is, however, important to recognise that social media is not inherently destructive. When properly utilised, it can serve as a powerful tool for education, civic engagement, and cultural promotion. Countries such as India, Kenya, and South Africa have leveraged platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook to deliver e-learning, health campaigns, and document indigenous knowledge [7]. In Nigeria, some universities and NGOs have begun using social media to teach local languages and broadcast cultural festivals. This dual potential of social media as both a threat and an opportunity forms the central tension this paper seeks to explore.

Speculatively, Cross River State could reverse the trend if institutions intentionally use TikTok and Instagram to promote Ekpe dance tutorials, Efik storytelling, and virtual

museum tours. The same algorithms that currently spread foreign content could be harnessed to make indigenous culture “*trend*.” However, this will require deliberate policy, funding, and youth involvement. If such strategies are ignored, the likely outcome is a cultural homogenization where Cross River youth become indistinguishable from global youth online. The problem, therefore, is not social media itself, but the lack of intentional strategies to mediate its influence on adolescents in tertiary institutions in Cross River State. Traditional institutions of socialisation are struggling to compete with the immediacy and appeal of digital media. Furthermore, the curriculum in many Nigerian tertiary institutions does not adequately address digital citizenship, media literacy, or cultural education in the digital age [6]. Students are left to navigate online spaces without guidance, often internalising values that erode communalism, respect, and cultural identity. Given this background, the central objective of this paper is to examine social media as a threat to cultural values among adolescents in tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework: Social Media, Youth Culture and Cultural Values

The conceptual framework for this study is built around three interrelated concepts: social media, youth culture, and cultural values. Understanding how these concepts interact is critical to explaining the influence of digital platforms on adolescents in tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Each concept is discussed in turn, followed by an explanation of their linkage within the context of this study.

Social media is generally understood as internet-based applications that allow individuals and groups to create, share, and exchange content within virtual networks [1]. Unlike traditional media, social media is interactive, instantaneous, and user-driven. It allows adolescents to not only consume content but also to produce and distribute it, thereby making them active participants in global communication. In Nigeria, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, X, and YouTube have become dominant spaces for youth interaction. In Cross River State, campuses like the University of Calabar and University of Cross River State have witnessed increased access to smartphones and campus internet, which has made social media a constant presence in students’ daily lives. Beyond communication, social media now serves as a source of entertainment, news, education, and identity construction. However, because most of the content that trends on these platforms originates outside Nigeria and often reflects Western lifestyles, there is growing concern that it exposes adolescents to values that may conflict with local traditions [3]. The algorithm-

driven nature of social media further compounds this issue, as it prioritizes sensational, entertaining, and foreign content that generates high engagement, thereby repeatedly exposing young users to global trends at the expense of local ones.

Youth culture refers to the distinctive patterns of behavior, values, language, fashion, and norms that characterize young people within a society. It is a dynamic and evolving culture that is shaped by age, peer influence, education, and the media environment. Traditionally in Cross River State, youth culture was nurtured through family upbringing, community institutions such as the Ekpe society and age grades, cultural festivals like the Calabar Carnival and Leboku, and the use of indigenous languages such as Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, and Yakurr. These institutions ensured that young people internalized values of respect for elders, communalism, modesty, and cultural pride. In recent years, however, the influence of these traditional agents has weakened, while social media has emerged as a powerful alternative agent of socialisation [2]. Today, many adolescents in tertiary institutions derive their sense of identity and belonging more from online communities than from local cultural groups. This has given rise to what can be described as “*digital youth culture*,” a hybrid of global and local influences. In this digital culture, students adopt foreign slang, music, fashion, and lifestyles seen online, often prioritising them over indigenous practices. If this trend continues, it is plausible to speculate that future generations of Cross River youth may grow up with limited knowledge of their cultural heritage, viewing it as outdated compared to the global culture promoted online. Cultural values are the shared beliefs, norms, and practices that guide the behaviour of a group of people and give them a sense of identity and continuity [4]. In Cross River State, cultural values are deeply rooted in communal life. Key values include respect for elders and authority, which is expressed through greetings and deference; communalism, which emphasises collective responsibility over individualism; morality and modesty in dressing and public conduct; and the preservation of language and rituals as carriers of history and worldview. Cultural festivals, traditional marriage rites, and storytelling are all mechanisms through which these values are transmitted from one generation to another. However, the advent of social media has introduced competing values that often emphasise individualism, self-promotion, consumerism, and instant gratification. For adolescents who are at a critical stage of identity formation, the constant exposure to these competing values creates tension. They are caught between the expectations of their home communities and the lifestyles promoted online. Empirical studies in Nigeria have shown

that excessive social media use correlates with declining participation in cultural activities and the adoption of foreign values among undergraduates [5]. In Cross River State, anecdotal evidence suggests similar patterns, with cultural clubs and indigenous language societies recording reduced student participation.

Theoretical preposition

The relationship between these three concepts can be explained using Cultural Imperialism Theory and Social Learning Theory. Cultural Imperialism Theory argues that dominant cultures use media to impose their values on less dominant cultures [8]. In this case, global content on social media platforms often promotes Western ideals of beauty, success, and behaviour. When adolescents in Cross River State are repeatedly exposed to this content, they may begin to perceive their own culture as inferior, leading to gradual erosion of indigenous values. Social Learning Theory further explains that individuals learn behaviours by observing and imitating models in their environment [9]. On social media, influencers and celebrities serve as powerful models. Adolescents who admire these figures are likely to imitate their dressing, speech, and lifestyle, even when such behaviours contradict local norms. This process of imitation, repeated over time, can lead to significant cultural change.

It is also important to note that social media is not entirely negative. When used deliberately, it can serve as a tool for cultural preservation and education. Countries such as Kenya, India, and South Africa have used platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp to document indigenous knowledge and deliver educational content [7]. In Nigeria, some institutions have begun using social media to teach local languages and promote cultural festivals. This suggests that the impact of social media on cultural values is not predetermined. It depends on how the platforms are used. In the context of Cross River State, three possible future scenarios can be speculated. First, if current usage continues without intervention, there may be further erosion of cultural values among adolescents. Second, a hybrid scenario may emerge where students blend global and local culture, creating new cultural forms. Third, with deliberate policy and education, social media could be repurposed to promote and revitalise Cross River cultural heritage.

Finally, the conceptual framework establishes that social media is reshaping youth culture, and youth culture is the primary medium through which cultural values are transmitted or lost. For adolescents in tertiary institutions in Cross River State, the interaction between these forces presents both a threat and an opportunity. This framework therefore provides the lens through which the rest of this study will examine the manifestations, impacts, and

possible strategies for managing social media influence on cultural values.

Manifestations of social media influence on adolescents in tertiary institutions

The influence of social media on adolescents in tertiary institutions in Cross River State is evident in several aspects of their daily lives, ranging from communication patterns and dressing to academic behaviour and participation in cultural activities. Given the high penetration of smartphones and campus internet facilities, students in institutions such as the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, College of Education Akamkpa, and Federal Polytechnic Ugep now spend a significant portion of their time online. This constant exposure has produced visible changes in how students relate to themselves, to others, and to their cultural environment. These manifestations can be grouped into linguistic, behavioural, social, academic, and cultural dimensions.

One of the most noticeable manifestations is in language use and communication patterns. Adolescents in tertiary institutions now communicate predominantly in a mixture of English, Nigerian Pidgin, and internet slang popularised on TikTok, Instagram and X. Indigenous languages such as Efik, Ejagham, and Bekwara are rarely used in peer-to-peer online interactions. Words, memes, and abbreviations that trend globally are quickly adopted by students, often replacing local expressions and proverbs that once conveyed cultural wisdom [2]. In group chats, lecture group WhatsApp forums, and even in informal campus conversations, it is common to hear phrases and intonations copied from foreign influencers. This shift suggests a gradual displacement of indigenous linguistic identity. If this continues, there is a likelihood that within a generation, many educated youths in Cross River State will be unable to speak their mother tongue fluently, thereby weakening intergenerational transmission of culture.

Another clear manifestation is in dressing and self-presentation. Social media platforms reward visual content, and adolescents are constantly exposed to fashion trends from global celebrities and influencers. On campuses in Cross River State, it is increasingly common to see students adopt hairstyles, tattoos, revealing clothing, and accessories that mirror what is trending online rather than what is culturally acceptable in their communities [4]. During school events, cultural days, and even regular lectures, some students appear in outfits that prioritise “online aesthetics” over modesty and cultural decorum. This reflects the power of social media to redefine standards of beauty and appropriateness. The implication is that traditional expectations around

dressings, which once signalled respect and identity, are being renegotiated to fit global digital norms.

Social behaviour and peer relationships have also been significantly altered. Social media has become the primary space for forming friendships, romantic relationships, and social status among students. Popularity on campus is now often measured by the number of followers, likes, and online visibility rather than by participation in community service or cultural groups [3]. Students spend hours creating content, following trends, and engaging in online challenges. This has led to a decline in face-to-face interaction and in participation in traditional campus associations such as cultural dance groups, language clubs, and age-grade meetings. In many cases, students would rather watch a viral dance challenge than attend a rehearsal for an Ekpe or Efik cultural performance. Speculatively, this shift may result in a generation of graduates who are digitally connected but socially disconnected from their cultural roots.

Academically, social media manifests both positively and negatively. On one hand, students use WhatsApp and YouTube for academic discussions, tutorials, and information sharing. On the other hand, studies in South-South Nigeria show that students spend an average of 5 to 8 hours daily on social media, with less than 20% of that time devoted to academic purposes [6]. The majority of time is spent on entertainment, gossip, and following international celebrities. During lectures, it is common to see students scrolling through TikTok or Instagram instead of taking notes. This divided attention affects academic performance and reduces the time available for reading, research, and engagement with course materials. Over time, this may produce graduates who are technologically savvy but academically shallow, with limited critical thinking skills.

Culturally, the most significant manifestation is the declining participation in indigenous cultural activities. Traditional festivals, language societies, and cultural troupes that once thrived in tertiary institutions are now struggling to attract members. Students report that such activities are “*not trending*” and do not generate online engagement compared to global music and dance trends [5]. The Calabar Carnival, which should be a source of cultural pride, is increasingly treated by students as a photo opportunity for social media rather than as a heritage event with historical meaning. There is also growing preference for foreign music, food, and lifestyle content over local content. This suggests that social media is gradually redefining what students consider “cool” or “*modern*,” often at the expense of local culture. It is important to state that not all manifestations are negative. Some students and student groups have begun using social media to showcase Cross River culture.

There are Instagram pages dedicated to Efik cuisine, TikTok videos teaching Ejagham greetings, and Facebook groups organising cultural discussions. However, these efforts remain limited and are often overshadowed by the volume of foreign content [7].

The positive role of social media in youth development

Despite the concerns around cultural erosion, social media has also played a significant and transformative role in the development of adolescents in tertiary institutions. When properly harnessed, digital platforms provide young people with tools for learning, self-expression, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and cultural promotion. In Cross River State, where access to physical resources may be limited, social media has become a critical space through which students access opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to them. The positive influence of social media on youth development can be examined under educational, economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

Educationally, social media has expanded access to information and learning resources for students in tertiary institutions. Platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook groups are now widely used by students in the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, and other campuses for academic collaboration. Lecturers share lecture materials, past questions, and video tutorials through class WhatsApp groups, while students use YouTube to understand difficult concepts in sciences, engineering, and social sciences [6]. During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent disruptions, social media became the primary channel for continuing education when physical classes were suspended. Beyond formal academics, students also use these platforms to develop digital literacy, research skills, and critical thinking by engaging with educational content creators and online courses. This suggests that social media, when directed toward learning, can bridge gaps in institutional resources and support academic growth.

Economically, social media has opened new pathways for entrepreneurship and financial independence among adolescents. Many students in Cross River State now run small businesses through Instagram, WhatsApp status, and Facebook Marketplace. They sell clothes, beauty products, food, academic materials, and digital services without needing physical shops. TikTok and Instagram have also become platforms for students to showcase talents in music, comedy, fashion design, and content creation, some of which have translated into income and brand deals [3]. For a region with high youth unemployment, this digital economy provides an alternative means of livelihood and skill development. It

also encourages creativity, marketing skills, and customer relations, all of which are important for future career development. If properly supported, this trend could position Cross River youths as key players in Nigeria's growing digital and creative economy.

Socially, social media has enhanced networking and civic participation among young people. It allows students to connect with peers across Nigeria and globally, exchange ideas, and participate in discussions on issues that affect them. During national events such as elections, protests, and social campaigns, students in Cross River State have used X and Facebook to mobilize, share information, and voice opinions [2]. Campus-based organizations also use social media to coordinate community service, health awareness campaigns, and mentorship programs. This has helped adolescents develop leadership skills, a sense of responsibility, and awareness of social issues. The ability to organize and communicate quickly through digital platforms has made youth voices more visible in public discourse than in previous generations.

Culturally, social media also presents opportunities for preservation and promotion of heritage. Although foreign content dominates, there is a growing number of students and youth groups using digital platforms to showcase Cross River culture. Instagram pages and TikTok accounts now feature Efik cuisine, traditional Ekpe dance steps, Bekwara proverbs, and behind-the-scenes videos of the Calabar Carnival [7]. Some student associations have started virtual storytelling sessions and language lessons on WhatsApp and YouTube to teach indigenous languages to younger members. This indicates that the same platforms accused of eroding culture can also be used to document, archive, and revitalise it. Countries such as Kenya and South Africa have successfully used social media to promote indigenous knowledge and cultural tourism, and a similar model can be adapted in Cross River State [7].

It is important to recognise that the positive impact of social media does not happen automatically. It requires digital literacy, mentorship, and a conscious effort by students, schools, and policymakers to direct online engagement toward productive ends. When adolescents are taught how to evaluate information, create value-driven content, and use platforms responsibly, social media becomes a tool for empowerment rather than distraction. Tertiary institutions in Cross River State can play this role by integrating media literacy and digital citizenship into their curriculum, and by encouraging student clubs to use social media for cultural and academic projects.

Countries that have used social media to promote education

While much of the discourse around social media

focuses on its negative effects, several countries have demonstrated that these same platforms can be strategically used to advance education, digital literacy, and access to learning. For adolescents in tertiary institutions, social media has moved beyond entertainment to become a tool for knowledge sharing, skill acquisition, and academic collaboration. Experiences from countries in Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world provide useful models that Cross River State and Nigeria can adapt to promote education among youths.

One of the most cited examples is India. The Indian government, in partnership with educational institutions and NGOs, has leveraged platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook to deliver free educational content to students across rural and urban areas. The “*DIKSHA*” platform and various state education departments run official YouTube channels where teachers upload lessons in mathematics, science, and languages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these channels became primary sources of instruction for millions of students who lacked access to online classrooms [7]. WhatsApp groups are also used by teachers to share assignments, conduct quizzes, and provide feedback. The success of India's model shows that when educational content is made accessible, engaging, and mobile-friendly, students are willing to use social media for learning rather than solely for entertainment.

In Kenya, social media has been instrumental in expanding access to education and vocational training. Organisations such as eLimu and Eneza Education use Facebook and WhatsApp to deliver SMS-based lessons, revision materials, and career guidance to secondary and tertiary students. Kenyan universities have also created official pages and groups where lecturers post lecture notes, host live Q&A sessions, and share research opportunities [7]. Additionally, Kenyan youths have used TikTok and YouTube to teach coding, digital marketing, and entrepreneurship skills, creating a peer-to-peer learning ecosystem. This approach has helped bridge the gap between formal education and practical skills needed in the job market. The Kenyan experience suggests that social media can democratize education by making it affordable and accessible to students regardless of location.

South Africa provides another relevant example. South African universities such as the University of Cape Town and the University of Johannesburg actively use Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to disseminate academic content, announce scholarships, and engage students in public lectures [7]. During periods of campus protests and disruptions, these platforms were used to continue learning through live streams and online discussions. Beyond institutions, South African educators and

influencers have created educational content on TikTok and Instagram, covering topics from science experiments to financial literacy. The government has also partnered with mobile networks to zero-rate educational websites and social media pages, ensuring that students can access learning materials without data costs. This model highlights the importance of policy support in making social media a viable educational tool.

Outside Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom have integrated social media into formal and informal education at the tertiary level. Professors use Twitter and LinkedIn to share research, engage in academic debates, and connect students with professionals in their fields. YouTube channels run by universities and educational creators provide free tutorials on complex subjects. During the pandemic, institutions like Harvard and Oxford moved many open courses online and promoted them through social media, reaching millions of learners globally [1]. The key lesson from these countries is that social media works best for education when it is combined with credible content, institutional backing, and digital literacy training for students.

For Nigeria and Cross River State, these examples offer important insights. Tertiary institutions can establish verified social media pages to share lectures, host live tutorials, and provide academic support. Departments can create WhatsApp and Telegram groups for each course to facilitate discussion and resource sharing. Student associations can use TikTok and Instagram to produce short educational videos in local languages, making learning more culturally relevant. The government and telecom companies can also collaborate to provide subsidised data for educational platforms, as done in South Africa. It can be concluded that, if Cross River State institutions adopt similar strategies, we may see improved academic performance, increased access to learning materials, and greater digital competence among students. Social media could also be used to promote indigenous knowledge by creating content on Efik history, Ejagham folklore, and Cross River environmental issues. This would ensure that education on these platforms is not only global but also local.

Negative impacts of social media on cultural values

While social media offers several benefits to adolescents in tertiary institutions, its unchecked use has also produced significant negative consequences for cultural values, particularly in a culturally diverse state like Cross River. Cultural values are the shared beliefs, norms, and practices that bind a people together and transmit identity across generations. When these values are constantly challenged by foreign content, instant gratification

culture, and algorithm-driven trends, adolescents may begin to detach from their heritage. In Cross River State, the manifestations of this detachment are already visible in language, dressing, social behaviour, and participation in traditional institutions.

One of the most profound negative impacts is the erosion of indigenous language and communication patterns. Adolescents in tertiary institutions in Calabar, Ugep, and Akamkpa now communicate predominantly in English, Nigerian Pidgin, and internet slang popularised on TikTok and Instagram. Indigenous languages such as Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, and Yakurr are rarely used in online chats, memes, or content creation [2]. This is because social media algorithms reward content that appeals to a global audience, and local languages are often perceived as having limited reach. Over time, this creates a situation where young people become more fluent in digital slang than in their mother tongue. If this trend persists, Cross River State risks losing intergenerational transmission of language, which is a core carrier of proverbs, history, and worldview.

Another major impact is the change in dressing and moral standards. Social media platforms are highly visual and reward exposure, self-branding, and imitation of celebrities. Students are constantly exposed to fashion and lifestyle trends from outside Nigeria that emphasise individualism, body display, and consumerism [4]. On many campuses in Cross River State, it is now common to see dressing styles that contradict traditional expectations of modesty and respect. Cultural days and even formal events are sometimes turned into opportunities to showcase “*trending*” outfits rather than indigenous attire. This shift suggests that standards of decency are being redefined by online trends rather than by community norms. The implication is that future leaders may grow up with little regard for cultural codes of conduct that once regulated public behaviour.

Social media has also contributed to the weakening of communalism and respect for authority. Traditional Cross River culture emphasises respect for elders, consultation, and collective decision-making. However, social media promotes individualism, self-promotion, and instant opinions [3]. Adolescents are exposed to influencers who challenge authority, mock traditions, and present alternative lifestyles as superior. In online spaces, students are more likely to seek validation from followers than from family or community elders. This has led to observable changes in student-lecturer and student-community relations, where deference is declining and confrontation is increasing. Speculatively, if this continues, the social fabric that holds communities together may become weaker, as young graduates enter society with values that prioritise personal brand over

collective responsibility.

The decline in participation in cultural activities is another critical impact. Cultural clubs, language societies, traditional dance troupes, and heritage festivals that once thrived in tertiary institutions are now recording low turnout. Students often describe these activities as “*not trending*” or “*not Instagrammable*” compared to global music and dance challenges [5]. Events like the Calabar Carnival and Leboku festival are increasingly attended for photo opportunities and social media content rather than for cultural education. This suggests that cultural participation is being driven by online visibility rather than by genuine appreciation of heritage. Over time, this may lead to cultural practices becoming mere performances for tourists rather than living traditions owned by the people.

Academically and psychologically, social media also contributes to distraction and identity confusion. Studies in South-South Nigeria show that students spend 5 to 8 hours daily on social media, with the majority of that time on entertainment rather than learning [6]. The constant comparison with global lifestyles creates pressure to conform, leading to anxiety, low self-esteem, and rejection of local identity. Adolescents may begin to view their own culture as “backward” and aspire to lifestyles that are economically and socially unattainable in their context. This identity conflict can result in a culturally homeless generation: disconnected from both global and local realities.

It is important to note that these negative impacts are not caused by social media technology itself, but by the nature of content that dominates these platforms and the absence of mediating structures. Because most trending content is produced outside Nigeria and reflects Western values, adolescents in Cross River State are disproportionately exposed to worldviews that are inconsistent with their cultural environment [8]. Without digital literacy and cultural education, students are left to navigate these spaces alone.

It is worth noting that the negative impacts of social media on cultural values in Cross River State are evident in language loss, changes in dressing and morality, weakening of communal values, declining cultural participation, and identity confusion. If no deliberate intervention is made, these impacts may deepen, leading to a gradual dilution of Cross River heritage among educated youths. However, recognizing these impacts is the first step toward developing strategies that can help adolescents engage with social media critically while remaining rooted in their culture.

Strategies for promoting cultural values amidst social media use

The influence of social media on adolescents in tertiary institutions cannot be reversed, nor should it be completely rejected. Digital platforms have become an integral part of learning, communication, and expression. The more realistic approach, therefore, is to develop intentional strategies that allow students in Cross River State to benefit from social media while still preserving and promoting their cultural values. Promoting cultural values in the digital age requires a multi-stakeholder effort involving tertiary institutions, government, parents, community leaders, and the students themselves. The following strategies are proposed to achieve this balance.

- i. **Integration of Digital Literacy and Cultural Education into the Curriculum:** Tertiary institutions in Cross River State such as the University of Calabar, UNICROSS, College of Education Akamkpa, and Federal Polytechnic Ugep should incorporate courses on digital citizenship, media literacy, and cultural education into General Studies. Students need to be taught how algorithms work, how to evaluate online content, and how to distinguish between global trends and cultural values worth preserving [6]. At the same time, courses should highlight the history, language, festivals, and ethics of Cross River communities. When students understand both the power of social media and the importance of their heritage, they are better positioned to make informed choices online. Institutions can also organise workshops on “*Creating Culturally Relevant Content*” to teach students how to use TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to promote Efik, Ejagham, and Bekwara traditions.
- ii. **Leveraging Social Media to Promote Indigenous Culture:** Instead of fighting social media, cultural custodians and student groups should use it as a tool for cultural promotion [7]. Departments of Linguistics, History, and Theatre Arts can collaborate with students to create short videos, podcasts, and infographics on indigenous languages, proverbs, folktales, and cultural practices. The Calabar Carnival, Ekpe dance, and traditional cuisine can be documented and made “*trend*” through challenges and hashtags. Parents, elders, and community leaders must reposition themselves as active agents in the digital lives of young people. This does not mean policing their phones, but engaging them in conversations about what they consume online and how it relates to home values [2]. Community associations and age grades can create WhatsApp and Facebook groups to share cultural teachings, stories, and announcements. During holidays, students should be encouraged to participate in cultural rites and festivals as content creators, not just attendees. This bridges the gap between offline tradition and online expression and

helps adolescents see culture as living and relevant.

- iii. **Policy and Institutional Support:** The Cross River State Ministry of Education and tertiary institution management should develop policies that encourage responsible social media use. This includes providing subsidized data bundles for access to educational and cultural content, as done in South Africa [7]. Institutions can also establish “*Digital Cultural Hubs*” on campus where students are trained to produce content that promotes local heritage. Reward systems such as grants, awards, and recognition for students who create the best cultural content online can serve as motivation. Furthermore, collaboration with telecom companies and content creators can help to zero-rate local cultural websites and apps.
 - iv. **Encouraging Role Models and Peer Influence:** Adolescents learn largely through imitation [9]. Tertiary institutions should identify and support student influencers who are already using social media positively to showcase Cross River culture. These students can serve as “Cultural Ambassadors” and mentors to peers. When young people see their colleagues gaining recognition for promoting indigenous language skits or traditional fashion, they are more likely to emulate it. Institutions and NGOs can partner to provide training and equipment for these ambassadors.
6. Promoting Critical Consumption and Content Creation

Summary

This study has examined social media as a threat to cultural values among adolescents in tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. The paper began by establishing that social media has become a dominant force in the lives of young people globally, with over 4.9 billion users as of 2023. In Nigeria, and particularly in Cross River State, adolescents in institutions such as the University of Calabar, UNICROSS, College of Education Akamkpa, and Federal Polytechnic Ugep are among the highest consumers of digital platforms. The conceptual framework clarified three key concepts: social media as interactive, user-driven platforms; youth culture as the values and behaviours that define young people; and cultural values as the shared beliefs and practices that give a people identity. Using Cultural Imperialism Theory and Social Learning Theory, the study explained how repeated exposure to foreign content and online role models can lead adolescents to adopt behaviours that conflict with indigenous traditions [8,9]. The paper identified several manifestations of

social media influence, including changes in language use, dressing, social behaviour, academic engagement, and declining participation in cultural activities. However, the negative impacts remain significant. These include erosion of indigenous languages, changes in moral standards, weakening of communalism and respect for authority, reduced participation in cultural activities, and identity confusion among students [5]. To address these challenges, the study proposed strategies such as integrating digital literacy and cultural education into the curriculum, leveraging social media to promote indigenous culture, strengthening family and community roles, policy support, and encouraging student-led cultural content creation.

Conclusion

Social media has come to stay as a central part of adolescent life in tertiary institutions. For students in Cross River State, it is a space for learning, socialising, entertainment, and self-expression. However, the evidence presented in this paper shows that without deliberate intervention, the constant exposure to global content can gradually erode the cultural values that define Cross River communities. The threat is not that students are using Facebook, TikTok, or Instagram. The threat lies in the absence of guidance, cultural education, and intentional use of these platforms to promote heritage. If current trends continue, there is a likelihood that within the next decade, indigenous languages, cultural practices, and communal values in Cross River State may witness further decline among educated youths.

On the other hand, if institutions, government, families, and students take deliberate steps, social media can become one of the strongest tools for cultural preservation and innovation. Therefore, the responsibility lies with all stakeholders. Tertiary institutions must integrate media literacy and cultural education into their programs. Government and community leaders must support digital initiatives that promote local content. Parents and elders must engage young people in meaningful conversations about culture. Most importantly, students themselves must take ownership of their digital presence by creating content that reflects and celebrates Cross River identity.

In the digital age, culture will not survive by isolation. It will survive by adaptation. Cross River State has a vibrant heritage. With the right strategies, that heritage can not only survive social media but thrive on it. The future of cultural values among adolescents in tertiary institutions will therefore depend on the choices made today: whether to allow social media to define culture, or to use social media to define and promote culture.

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